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THE GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL.

THE
GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

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THE
GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL.

CHAPTER I.

ENLIGHTENMENT.

‘**H**OW are you thinking of spending your Christmas?’

‘Very quietly,’ answered Selwyn. It was a question he had earnestly desired to avoid, but with Mr. Kerry as examiner-in-chief, and cross-examiner as well, there was no escaping anything.

‘You’ll be going down, I suppose, to your old place?’

‘No, my friends kindly asked me, but the journey and other matters would cost too

much, and besides, I should have to be thinking about coming back as soon as I got there.'

'Why don't you ask for a week? Cramsey is giving me a week. If he hadn't I'd just have taken one, so he thought he might as well make a virtue of necessity.'

'But you have been here a great deal longer than I——'

'That makes no difference at all, and if it did, what's the good of you and Trosdale being as thick as thieves if he won't give you a day or two extra? Put it to him; he'll let you go without a word.'

'I dare say he would; but I don't care to ask for leave so soon——'

'Soon!' interrupted Mr. Kerry; 'haven't you been in this devil of a town for more than five months?'

'I have; but anyhow it would not be much pleasure to me to go back to a place where everyone belonging to me is dead.'

'And sure you have nobody living belonging to you here,' said the Irishman.

'That is quite true,' answered Selwyn, not very cheerfully.

‘I’ll tell you what I’d like well you would do,’ began Mr. Kerry, after a short pause.

‘And that is——’ prompted Selwyn, not without many misgivings as to the particular recommendation or suggestion which was to follow.

‘Just for you to ask a week from Trosdale—you’d get it right enough—and cross with me. The cousin I’m going to see would welcome you with all the veins of his heart ; and though he’s not exactly one of the tip-tops, still he’s a man as lives in as good a house as you’d wish for ; farms his hundred statute acres, and farms them well ; keeps a couple of good riding horses—sometimes more—and a brace of greyhounds. You would have a day or two’s good coursing—for his house is under the shadow of Slieve Donard—and no end of diversion. They live like fighting-cocks—turkeys and geese and game of all sorts. There is nothing grand about the place—it is, maybe, a bit rough and tumble ; but I don’t know a visitor comes off any the worse for that. They’d be that proud to make you welcome I couldn’t express. My cousin is not to say an old man, yet he’s not

so young neither. He married a woman who brought him more than herself—what you ought to look out for—a good fortune ; and they have a couple of daughters—fine lumps of girls as you'd wish to know—up to every manner of devilment. Lord ! you should see them at Hallowe'en. Well, a word's enough, and I have spoken ten at the least. Will you come with me—yes, or no ?

' I am afraid it must be "no," ' said Selwyn, really touched by Mr. Kerry's kindness, and struck by the novel household described.

' Why must it ? ' asked the other. ' They'd make a king of you.'

' I cannot say how friendly I think this is,' said Selwyn, laying his hand on Second Liverpool's Assistant's coat-sleeve ; ' but I do not feel in spirits for general society at present. As I told you, I mean to spend this Christmas as quietly as possible.'

' Well, you might be quiet as a hermit at Inchbarran. You could have a room and the mountains mostly to yourself, and not a living soul to say, "Why do you ?" or "Why don't you ?" The change would be the making of you. Say "Yes—I'll come." '

‘I cannot indeed. Thank you ever so much ; but it is quite impossible.’

This refusal seemed to impress Mr. Kerry greatly. He did not make any direct answer, only began to kick his heels dolefully against the legs of the table on which he had seated himself, while he broke into what, perhaps, he intended for a lyrical exposition of the joys Mr. Serle was casting from him :

“ Ach—I am her as makes the stir,
From Cork along by Skibbere-na,
All the day we drinks strong tay
An’ whisky too, says Norah Creina.”

‘That is a very remarkable song you are singing,’ ventured Selwyn, as Mr. Kerry triumphantly whooped out the last six words.

‘It’s a right good one,’ retorted Mr. Kerry, who for some reason seemed to take Selwyn’s innocent observation in ill part. ‘Maybe you never heard the whole of it?’

‘I never heard any of it before,’ answered the other.

“ Oh ! who are ye that comes this way ? ”

resumed the singer,

“ So like the Empress Dejanaira——”

‘Like the Empress what?’ asked Selwyn, fairly nonplussed.

‘Dejanaira, man—are you deaf? There, you have put me all out. That’s one of Phil’s songs, and grand he sings it when he has had a glass or two. You’d best change your mind, and come along with me. You’ll never regret it; and you needn’t be thinking it’s wanting to catch you for either of the daughters I am. They are both promised; girls like them can have their pick and choice. It’s all fair and aboveboard — feather-beds you’ll sink in, and that rise like mountains on each side of you; fires fit to roast an ox; spiced beef, the taste of which you’d never forget; as much of the best Dunville’s whisky as ever you care put your lips to, and lashins of everything. Now, I’ll count on it that you’ll cross with me on the twenty-third. So no more.’

‘Indeed, Mr. Kerry, I feel sadly vexed to seem to slight your kindness, but I cannot accept your invitation.’

‘And why can’t you?’

‘For one reason, because I don’t want to spend the money.’

‘Why, it would be far and away cheaper for you to go to Phil’s than stay in your lodgings. The fare over and back is next to nothing, and it is only a step in the railroad, and we get on by the mail-car that will charge us two shillings a-piece—and elegant travelling it is too. Ireland is not like here, where you’ve to be putting your hand in your pocket before you can cross a street almost. They’ve only a couple of servant girls at Inchbarran, and if you give them a shilling a-piece they’ll think they are made men. Come, now, you won’t be stiff—you’ll bear me company on Tuesday sen-night?’

‘It is very kind of you,’ Selwyn answered, ‘but I wish you would not press me, for I have quite made up my mind to stay quietly in Liverpool.’

‘Well, well!’ exclaimed Mr. Kerry. ‘Well, well! you are a queer fellow! What are you going to do with yourself?’

‘I will see when the time comes,’ returned Selwyn, badgered to death.

‘Who are you that ax my name?’ crooned Mr. Kerry lugubriously, kicking his feet

against the leg of the table in time to his mournful ditty :

“ Othello, Wat Tyler, or Julius Cæsar,
Or are ye Venus of great fame,
Or that old fogey Nebuchadnezzar ;
Or maybe ye are Pluto stout,
Or jolly old Bacchus, drunk and hearty ? ”

It is to Trosdale's you're going for your Christmas dinner, I suppose ? ' he broke off suddenly to observe.

Selwyn flushed to his hair. He had hoped that perchance he might escape ; but the Irishman was inexorable.

‘ Mr. Trosdale has kindly asked me, ’ he replied.

‘ I deemed as much, ’ said Mr. Kerry. Then, after a moment, ‘ I deemed as much. Bad luck to him for a Trosdale ! and bad luck to him again I repeat. What did he want meddling with you ? No franker, pleasanter young fellow, though I say it to your face, ever came into this cursed old barrack ; and you kept the same till my gentleman laid a spell on you. And what are you now ? I'll tell you—another man ; that's what Trosdale has done—changed you

as the fairies change babies. Ay, it is a spell he has laid on you. When I am over at Phil's, I'll speak to Father O'Neill about the matter.'

'I beg you will do no such thing,' cried Selwyn in hot anger.

'Ah! there you go; that is Trosdale all over. He has got you safe enough. I had best be off now, I'm doing no good here. It's little use wishing you a merry Christmas, so I'll just keep a quiet tongue in my head.' With which impossible resolution Mr. Kerry departed, inquiring dolefully in a subdued tenor:

'“ Won't you dine with me to-day?
I'll tell you who we'll have for dinner,
And lest you should refuse to stay,
I'll send for you a horse and crupper.
Magillicuddy of the Reeks,
O'Donoghue Glen, the Duke of Gloster,
Oliver Cromwell, and Brien O'Linn——”'

But at that point the outer door slamming behind the Irishman cut off the remainder of his guests.

'Good Heavens! What a nuisance you are!' thought Selwyn ungratefully. 'Can I

not eat my Christmas dinner where I please, without your permission ?'

The young man's heart was very hot within him. Never before had he met with anyone so pertinacious as the Irishman.

'Mr. Trosdale was quite right,' he considered, in great dudgeon. 'It does not do to make intimates of people who will persist in taking an ell when you have been so foolish as to give them an inch. And yet I am confoundedly sorry,' he went on, softening as Mr. Kerry got further and further away from him. 'He has been very good to me. Still I could not, if I would, give up every friend I have in the world to please him, and that's about what it comes to. I must shut him up, once and for all, if he says anything more about Trosdale, and it is very hard, indeed, to be forced to quarrel with one man because I like another better.'

Selwyn, however, was not driven to such a necessity ; for Mr. Kerry found so much to do in the way of what he called 'reddin' up' before he started on his travels, that he had rarely leisure even to circumvent the Long-Room gang.

‘It is wasted to a shadow I am,’ he said, with a rueful laugh, when he came to plant his foot on the pillar in Third Liverpool prior to his departure. ‘But never mind, I’ll fill out when once I get to Phil’s;’ with which cheerful prophecy he departed, accompanied to the boat by ‘Mister Serle,’ whom he insisted on introducing to the captain and many of the minor officials.

‘I hope you will enjoy yourself,’ said Mr. Trosdale’s Assistant, as they paced the deck, regardless of a drizzling rain and the black smoke which puffed now and then in their faces.

‘Faith, there’s no fear of that,’ rejoined Mr. Kerry. ‘What’s troubling me is the sort of Christmas you’re like to spend. Everyone to his taste, though. I knew an old Scotchman once who declared that, for thorough harmony and cheerful conviviality, there was nothing to be compared to a good funeral, so I hope the merry-making in St. Paul’s Square may suit you. There’s the bell. Well, good-bye till we meet again. God be with you. Amen.’

It was with a sense of ashamed relief

Selwyn saw the vessel glide from her moorings and steam away from the harbour lights into the darkness, and yet he felt an inexplicable sadness steal over him when the figure of Mr. Kerry, frantically waving his hat, grew blurred and indistinct, and at last faded totally out of sight.

He was more than usually impressionable just at that time, and the depressing evening, the murky river, the stillness where all had been a minute previously noise and hustle, produced an effect out of all proportion with the cause.

He took a long turn through the less frequented Liverpool streets before retracing his steps to his lodgings. As the Christmas season drew nigh, his soul waxed faint and feeble by reason of old memories. All those he had lost—those he could never within the compass of this world, wide as it is, hope to possess again—came shadows from shadow-land, and stood sorrowfully beside his hearth, as though grieving that it was so solitary.

They came with such pity and love and yearning on their remembered faces, which he should see no more for ever as he had seen

them, that he was often forced to rise and go out into the stormy night and the driving rain to exorcise his fancy ; and then he had to return because the notion of those ghostly hands stretched forth to meet him, those eyes full of wondering sadness at his flight from their wistful gaze, seemed to him more than he could bear.

In St. Paul's Square these phantoms rarely appeared, and, when they did, it was but to pass across the field of Selwyn's vision and vanish like the shadows they were.

'How should I have got through Christmas Day, had Mr. Trosdale not invited me?' was the one idea which kept constantly recurring to his mind. 'I must have walked the streets, for I could not possibly have stayed indoors.'

On the last 25th of December he had refused to go to Sea Court because his uncle did not care to accompany him, and the dear old man seemed low.

To the close of his life he knew he should feel glad that he had not taken his pleasure, and left one whose goodness to his own kin was like God's summer and winter, inasmuch

as it never changed alone when the end came.

For the end began late on Christmas night, and ere the bells crashed out their greeting to the New Year Selwyn had no kith or kin left to him on the earth.

Therefore this, the first Christmas of his loneliness, had seemed very terrible in anticipation. He felt he could not spend it with Mr. Kerry, or any of the few men who had made advances to him. To pass it solitary in his lodgings, or go away all by himself to some place where he could walk beside the sea and think of those loved and lost, with the waves moaning an accompaniment to his sorrow, seemed preferable to that.

Neither, since there was always mirth and jollity at Sea Court, did he, though sure of the most cordial and sympathetic of welcomes, feel inclined to go there; and his spirits were sinking lower and lower at the prospect before him, when Mr. Trosdale's invitation—'If you have no better engagement, Serle, will you eat your Christmas dinner with us?'—came to cheer his heart.

'I shall be very glad indeed,' he answered,

with an earnestness which set Mr. Trosdale again thinking.

At the end of a few days that gentleman said carelessly, while sorting his papers :

‘ Could you not come to the Square on Christmas Eve, and stay till after the new year ? There will be little doing in the office ; your landlady is certain to go out pleasuring, and I should be delighted to see more of you. We can put you up without the slightest inconvenience.’

At the words Selwyn’s heart leapt for joy, but he could frame no answer except, ‘ You are so kind, Mr. Trosdale. You are too kind to me.’

Well he knew where he could be ‘ put up ’—in a little bed-chamber partitioned off the length of the drawing-room, where he had ‘ washed and brushed up ’ times without number—a chamber looking out over St. Paul’s dreary church and drearier graveyard, yet which seemed pleasant and homelike to the young fellow. He thought he should like greatly to spend a little time under Mr. Trosdale’s roof ; yet, after his first impulsive utterance, modesty or some other feeling

urged him to add 'that he feared, if he came, he might cause inconvenience to Miss Trosdale.'

'Madge is never inconvenienced,' declared Madge's father; 'and she would like you to be with us, I know.'

After this statement, Selwyn accounted it odd that Miss Trosdale should say, as she did say :

'So you really intend spending your Christmas here? It is very good of you, but I am afraid you will find it sadly dull.'

If the young man she addressed had been given to light compliment, Miss Trosdale's look and Miss Trosdale's manner must have frozen any graceful flattery on his lips. As things were :

'I shall not be dull,' was the only reply he could make; and he went home thinking with passionate bitterness, 'She might have been more civil, particularly so near Christmas—she might have been more civil.'

At last the 24th of December arrived, and Selwyn, after he had locked up the office, bent his steps to St. Paul's Square, where Mr. Trosdale stood at the door to

accord a welcome which only lacked the touch of a woman's sympathy to make it perfect. But that he was not destined to receive.

'Madge is spending the evening with one of her many friends,' explained Mr. Trosdale—'a little dance, or something; so you will have to make yourself as happy as you can with me alone.'

Quite sincerely, Selwyn answered he always felt very happy with Mr. Trosdale. Nevertheless, he was conscious that if Madge had only remained at home long enough to say, 'I am glad to see you, Mr. Serle,' he would have been happier still.

'It is a great pleasure to me to have you here,' said Mr. Trosdale, standing after tea in front of a glowing fire. 'I like to talk to a young man full of hope and energy—with life before instead of behind him. What would I not give to be in your shoes! With my present experience, what a brilliant future I might make for myself! When I think of the years I have lost—years that can return no more, I feel as if I could curse the evil destiny which cast me tied and bound into that social abyss, a tax-office.'

‘I have heard you say something to the same effect before,’ answered Selwyn, ‘with surprise ; for, though a tax-office is not perhaps the place in which one would choose to spend one’s life, still in all careers there must be some unpleasantness ; and I should have thought, in your position——’

‘You would have thought in my position I might rest content with the pittance Government deems sufficient to maintain a gentleman.’

‘I suppose the remuneration does seem very little to you,’ said Selwyn, rather abashed, though standing to his guns ; ‘but yet many gentlemen have to be content on much less. My father, for instance,’ he added diffidently, ‘never possessed a third of your income, and my poor old uncle was happy enough on half.’

‘But then their professions conferred on them social advantages. A curate is a king, an emperor, when compared with that miserable pariah, a Surveyor of Taxes.’

‘You speak bitterly. Do you really consider the rank you hold low ?’

Mr. Trosdale laughed sarcastically.

‘Low?’ he repeated. ‘You ask that—you, who have been in the office? Low! Can’t you tell the estimation in which a Surveyor is held by the tone every beggarly tradesman who comes to make a complaint adopts towards him? Low! There is not a calling in the Directory, that can be followed in a fairly honest manner, which is not to be preferred to the business of a Surveyor. On every side he is hampered by his responsibility for the actions of irresponsible persons. If one of his Collectors administers the law with impartial strictness—and that is how every Collector ought to administer it—the Surveyor is reprimanded by the Board of Inland Revenue, and peremptorily asked, “Why, sir, did you allow this to go on?” On the other hand, when he ventures to remonstrate with the Collector, he is promptly told the Collector is the servant of the Local Commissioners, and accountable to them only. The whole system,’ went on Mr. Trosdale, warming with his theme, ‘under which the Income Tax Acts are administered is grotesquely impracticable—the misbegotten offspring of some childish

theorist, who was afraid of the cursed tax he had created, and hampered it with checks which protect nobody, and securities which only pamper sinecurists.'

'It certainly does seem,' said Selwyn thoughtfully, 'as if there had been an attempt at combining two systems. I never understand, for instance, why the Local Commissioners do not make the assessments.'

'Why?' interrupted the Surveyor hotly; 'why because they won't. Why should they? They are not paid for doing it; and there is no one to enforce the legal obligation. They have a Clerk, a solicitor in good practice (you know him), who draws £1,000 a year for acting as Clerk to the Commissioners; and what work does he do? Make the assessments? No such thing. He has a Clerk, who has an Assistant, who receives the Income Tax Returns from the Assessors, and sends them down to the Surveyor, with the skeleton of the assessment which is to be made. Then the Surveyor sets to work to make it.'

'So that the Surveyor does what the Clerk to the Commissioners is paid for doing?'

‘ Exactly ; and for practical purposes there might as well be no Local Commissioners at all. The fool who framed the Act thought he was providing a set of paternal angels, who would watch carefully over the interests of the whole community, and see that the Act did not press hardly on anyone ; who would use their local knowledge to redress grievances, and in a word see fair play all round. Instead of that, what happened at the Commissioners’ meeting the other day ? You remember how long we waited before any Commissioner came ? At last old Elliott rushed in, with his watch in his hand. “ Dear me, Mr. Symonds,” he said to the Clerk, with the faintest nod to us ; “ my horses are standing. I hope there isn’t much to do.” “ Is Mr. Amphlett coming ? ” asked Symonds. “ I don’t know ; but I can’t wait to see. What’s this ? Where am I to sign it ? Is it all right ? Oh, well, you must get another signature at your leisure. Good-day ; there’s nothing more, is there ? ” And so he went off, without having once looked at the assessment which he certified as correct ; and that assessment, Mr. Serle, went then and there

to the Collector, and he has collected money on it, every penny of which is illegally collected until the assessment is signed by a second Commissioner.'

'But surely,' said Selwyn, 'if that were known, the Clerk to the Commissioners would get into trouble.'

'No; the Surveyor would. Though the Surveyor has no more control over the Commissioners or their Clerk than he has over the Lord Chancellor, though they snub him when he protests, and snap their fingers at him when he remonstrates, yet the Board would censure him heavily for any irregularity of this sort.'

'Pleasant, certainly,' remarked Selwyn.

'Isn't it?' retorted Trosdale—'isn't it pleasant? And what is even worse, is that all the unpopularity falls on the head of the unfortunate Surveyor. I heard a thickheaded jackass arguing, the other day, that it was only the Surveyors' greediness for power which led them to usurp the functions of the Commissioners. I could hardly help laughing in the idiot's face. Is it likely that the Surveyors would allow so much extra work

to be thrust on them if they could help it ?

‘It is an anomalous system,’ Selwyn said. ‘I don’t quite see how it has grown up. But what appears to me more extraordinary, is what you say about the small consideration in which the Surveyors are held. How do you account for that, Mr. Trosdale ?’

‘Why that,’ said his host, ‘comes from the nature of the appointments. Gentlemen, as a rule, won’t take them. You must see for yourself, by this time, that the work we have to do is essentially dirty work. Don’t you feel that ? A man makes us a return of his income ; and, without paying any attention to it, we assess him at half as much again. He comes and remonstrates ; and we put all manner of prying questions, which he ought to resent by kicking us. Then we demand an account, which is practically telling him he is a liar ; and even when we get his account, as likely as not we refuse to accept it.’

Selwyn laughed as if he were a little vexed.

‘I do greatly dislike putting those questions,’ he said.

‘Of course you do. And why? Because you feel contaminated by the impertinent suspicions you have to put into words. As I was saying, it’s very rarely that a gentleman will take one of these appointments. He’s not wanted in a tax-office; he’s as much out of place as—as—well, as our friend Kerry would be at a decent dinner-table. And because the public do not find gentlemen to deal with, they naturally don’t attempt to deal with them as gentlemen. I heard a man the other day abusing you. What did he call you?—“an insolent puppy,” wasn’t it?’

‘Worse than that. He said I was “a d—d red-headed, insolent blackguard.” But I didn’t mind him in the least,’ added Selwyn, who had minded ‘him’ greatly.

‘Perhaps not,’ answered the Surveyor; ‘but it is galling to think any low scamp can use language of that sort with impunity, to the representative of such a department as the Inland Revenue. It is sheer mismanagement, Mr. Serle, which has allowed so scandalous a state of affairs to grow up. Whenever you see a contemptuous attitude on the part of the public, be sure it originates in

the mistakes of the heads of the department. I say the Inland Revenue is corrupt—it is rotten to the core.’

‘I hope it may soon improve then, since I shall have to spend my life in it.’

‘I hope you will not; you would be mad to do it. For a few years, while you are young, and finding out where your strength lies, you may well stay in the service; but for a man with brains and intelligence, not to speak of the instincts of a gentleman, it is the last place on earth to rest content. If I had sons I would say to them “Dig, plough, drive a cart, do anything, be anything, rather than a servant in the Inland Revenue.”’

‘That is not a very bright look-out for me,’ observed Selwyn.

‘It is not a very bright look-out for any man decently born and bred. It may be all well enough for fellows like Kerry and Cramsey—fellows to whom a situation in a tax-office is promotion, and the wretched salary wealth; but for a young man of parts, of the most ordinary intelligence, possessed of the slightest sensitive feeling and any

desire to get on in the world, our office is death.'

'But what is a man who has stumbled or strayed into it to do?'

'Take his salary till he finds out what he is fit for. You will discern ere long the road you are suited to travel, and then you can resign. That is the best of the Civil Service—you can always resign.'

'I do not think I should like to resign,' remarked Selwyn, to whom this seemed remarkably cold comfort. 'My poor old uncle always said: "A rolling stone gathers no moss."'

'According to your account, your uncle, although he did not roll, does not seem to have gathered much moss.'

'Perhaps not, but he was very happy and contented.'

'Well, let us hope you may be happy and contented, and gather some moss too,' answered Mr. Trosdale; 'and now let us forget the office. It is not so pleasant a subject—I don't know how we chanced to drift into it. Come into my special sanctum. As we have a long evening before us I will

show you some things that will interest and surprise you.'

Nothing loth, Selwyn followed his host into a room which must, it at once occurred to him, have been the same where Mr. Kerry was not even invited to 'sit down off his feet,' or asked, as he pathetically complained, 'whether he had a mouth on him.'

'I was not the better for my visit,' he said, 'not by a toothful,' which was perhaps stating the case with unnecessary precision.

'Sit down, sit down,' entreated Mr. Trosdale to his more favoured guest, and Selwyn did so and looked about him, finding plenty to reward his scrutiny.

In that room, which was crammed, there appeared everything a man in Mr. Trosdale's position might have been supposed not to want.

The fireplace was blocked up by a portable forge; in front of a window giving on to a small back-yard stood a stove, the smoke being carried away through a pipe which passed through a square of zinc let in where a pane of glass had been. In one corner Selwyn espied a carpenter's bench and lathe,

and in another a vice and anvil ; a long deal table littered with rough drawings and papers occupied a large part of the floor, while the walls were lined with shelves that groaned under the weight of pamphlets, blue-books, newspapers, patent journals, scientific works, wooden patterns, bottles containing chemicals, scales and weights, parcels of all sorts and sizes, retorts, measuring glasses, and a variety of other valuable refuse which might well have caused a model housewife to pray for a fire.

‘Now,’ said Mr. Trosdale, who, while Selwyn was taking soundings of the strange place in which he found himself, had been unearthing from a huge chest various brown-paper scrap-books, which he laid on the table ; ‘now you shall see for yourself what I might have done had I not been for years and years bound body and soul to a corpse which would have totally paralyzed the energies of most men.’

And having thus distinctly indicated that he was the one man whose powers even the dead weight of tax-work had been unable totally to crush, the Surveyor proceeded to

show his Assistant some of the tasks he found heart and leisure to essay out of those hours when he was serving her most gracious Majesty.

Had any curious inquirers who wished to learn how far egotism will carry a man been wandering about St. Paul's Square on the Christmas Eve of 1879, he would scarcely have found a finer study than Mr. Trosdale, holding forth in that littered room held sacred to genius.

Madge was securely absent, he had the field all to himself, and accordingly, mounted on the only hobby he cared to ride, he spurred straight on. Not a detail of any one of the wonderful things he had invented, perfected, been forestalled in, robbed of, lacked money to secure, was Selwyn spared. His young head ached with trying to follow his chief's rapid narrative ; but he was interested in the confidence, nevertheless, and flattered by it enormously.

To those whose knowledge of life is limited, a discontented man always seems half a hero, and even if he had not known it before that Christmas-tide ended, Selwyn must have

been well aware his host considered himself an ill-used and unappreciated individual.

This was his religion, and he did not hide his belief under a bushel. Every person in the office was of course aware Third Liverpool held the enviable position of being a more wronged man than any other of the wronged men who drew their salaries with praiseworthy regularity ; but no one save young Serle knew precisely how he had come by this faith.

Selwyn himself, indeed, spite of constant complaints, vague hints, and endless references, had hitherto only seen Mr. Trosdale's position from that gentleman's own point of view dimly and uncertainly. On that memorable Christmas Eve, however, the Surveyor let whole floods of light illumine the wide landscape of a misspent life.

A dreary retrospect, save for the faith and the hope that had lit up its gloom—a record of office work which the man hated, and invention which he loved. The duty lying close to his hand he never discharged, while faithfully serving a friend who as yet had paid him no wages except in fairy gold.

Not in heaven were Mr. Trosdale's works chronicled ; but rather in Southampton Buildings, London, W.C. There all interested in such lore might read writ large the name of Martin Trosdale, St. Paul's Square, Liverpool, patentee of inventions, improvements, adaptations.

Had the money spent in compassing even the first step along that well-beaten highway which generally leads to ruin been capitalized, the interest would have procured many a small luxury the modest household in St. Paul's Square lacked, while the amounts netted by her Majesty's servants at the Patent Office from her Majesty's other servant, Third Liverpool, were simply enough to have provided an adequate income for his own old age, and for the old age of his daughter after him.

Yes, within the flimsy blue wrappers that contained the specifications of those inventions for which Martin Trosdale had been granted provisional protection, in those formal applications that set forth his intention to proceed, in those parchments, adorned with a resin seal as large as a saucer, and

quite as brittle, familiar to the sight of every man who elects to spend his substance on patent rights, there lay most of the money earned during nearly half his lifetime by the Surveyor. What had he not invented, indeed? That were perhaps easier to tell than the full tale of things, small and great, concerning which Mr. Trosdale alternately lauded and bemoaned himself; for the novelties patented in his name were mere drops in the ocean when compared with the great ideas he had been robbed of or forestalled in.

Here was a rake, for instance, an incomparable rake. If Selwyn would kindly look closely into the drawings, he would see how immeasurably superior it was to all other rakes that had been in vogue since Adam went haymaking in Eden. It was a rake that would work of itself. Well—would Mr. Serle believe it?—a scoundrel of the name of Melridge somehow got a hint on the subject, and the very day before Mr. Trosdale applied for Provisional Protection wrested the rake out of the hands of its legal owner.

‘He got all the great agricultural imple-

ment makers to take it up, and he is making a fortune—he has made his fortune indeed—by means of what was really even my invention——’

It was the same with everything. From coffee-pots to steam-engines Mr. Trosdale believed he could add the final charm each needed to make it perfect. There seemed nothing too small and nothing too great for him to undertake.

‘But all I have ever attempted,’ he said at last, with an air of pardonable triumph, ‘pales into insignificance beside my blast furnace. To-morrow you shall know all about that. It is getting late now, and you had better go to bed,’ which Selwyn did, with the promise of abundant scientific talk on the morrow.





CHAPTER II.

IN ST. PAUL'S.

FNTICING though the prospect of another long *tête-à-tête* no doubt seemed, Selwyn next morning piously decided to attend church, a place for which Mr. Trosdale evidently felt as little fondness as for the tax-office.

The young man walked across to St. Paul's alone, and returned from it with no one save himself for company.

He lingered a little in the vestibule after service, hoping Madge might join him; but as she made no effort to do so he retraced his way through the dreary graveyard, feeling she was indeed a most inexplicable girl.

'I should so much have liked to like her,' he thought; 'but if she will not let me, there is no help for it.'

They dined early off turkey and plum pudding, the former being a present from Mr. Ashford, who though absent in the body desired that some worthy memory of him might be recalled at the Christmas board.

Mr. Trosdale was loud in his praises of the bird—unnecessarily so, though the turkey was not one to be despised.

Except the Surveyor, no one ate much : the guest because his heart felt full and his spirit faint ; Madge because Christmas seemed to produce the same depressing effect on her that set times and seasons usually do on those who have passed their first childhood and not attained their second.

After dinner she left her father and Selwyn without apology, and they saw her no more for hours. Where she was gone Mr. Trosdale seemed neither to know nor care.

‘She goes her way and I go mine,’ is a very elastic phrase, and one which may cover any extent of domestic division.

The dull, heavy day might well have dispirited a younger and livelier man than the Surveyor ; but it did not produce any de-

pressing effect on him. On the contrary, he seemed to enjoy it thoroughly.

He stirred the fire into a still more cheerful blaze, and as an appropriate accompaniment to the wine, walnuts, and other good cheer provided for their entertainment, produced his blast furnace and delivered an exhaustive oration on its inception and progress from birth to maturity.

‘I am about at last to reap my reward,’ he said. ‘I shall make my fortune, I shall become famous ; I have been only waiting for money to protect and introduce it. A friend is going to find me the money, and directly the new year comes in I shall give my agent instructions to push on the patent as fast as possible. Till he tells me he has done so I dare not make the principle of my invention generally known ; but I will not lose a moment after he has made me safe. Then everything will be changed. After long years I shall be able to take my right position in society and live up to it. Madge, too, will see that her father was not a mere visionary, and be rescued from the drudgery which it galls me even to think a child of mine has to endure.

You will see her differently placed before very long—see her happy, admired, sought after.'

'I am so glad, I am so very glad,' said Selwyn eagerly, which utterance was wrung from him as much by the hint of good things in store for Mr. Trosdale as the promise of deliverance from thralldom for Madge.

'I believe you are,' answered Mr. Trosdale, as though there were something well-nigh incredible in the notion of any man being pleased at the well-doing of another ; 'I really believe you are.'

'You may be sure I am,' rejoined Selwyn, half shyly putting out his hand, which the Surveyor took and held while he said :

'Do you know, I think it possible you might hasten the coming of Good Fortune a little.'

'I ! how ? only tell me in what way, and I will do everything I can to hurry her.'

'If you could make the drawings for me it would be a great assistance.'

Selwyn's face fell.

'I do not draw very well,' he hesitated ; but then he brightened up and added, 'I can

try, however, and I will try my best. When shall I begin ?

‘Not to-night,’ replied Mr. Trosdale. ‘I have not proper materials in the house ; but to-morrow, if you like. You are certain I am not asking too much ?’

‘Nothing you could ask would be too much,’ returned the young fellow, little knowing what he was saying ; ‘I am greatly obliged to you for letting me be of this slight service, that is, if I can finish the drawings to your mind.’

‘Only do them as well as you did your uncle’s pump, and they will answer every purpose,’ said Mr. Trosdale — a reply which would have aroused uncomfortable suspicions in many minds ; but Selwyn was not suspicious, and he took the words merely as a reassuring compliment.

For a good part of the evening he employed himself in making sketches, of which Mr. Trosdale approved very highly.

‘And to think,’ he observed pathetically, ‘that you are wasting your time in a tax-office !’

When people make observations of this

kind, they generally omit to say how time could be spent better than in following the particular avocation disparaged ; but it is an easy way of sowing the seeds of discontent, and men who are not contented themselves seldom like to see others satisfied.

‘ I am afraid,’ answered Selwyn, ‘ if I had to earn my living by my pencil I might have to wait a long time for breakfast.’

‘ Ah ! you will view matters with different eyes one day,’ said Mr. Trosdale ; and then he reverted to his favourite theme, and told his Assistant what he intended to do whenever the success of his latest invention was secured.

‘ I shall throw up the office, of course, and leave Liverpool ; buy a place in or near London, possibly, which I can make my head-quarters. I mean to travel a good deal, and see what other nations are doing. I ought to go to America, too—there is no country in the world where a practical man is so fully appreciated.’

It is not altogether pleasant to sit and hear plans discussed in which the hearer has no part or lot ; and while he listened, Selwyn

felt the old loneliness and desolation creeping towards him. The Trosdales, who had just crossed his life, would pass out of it, and he would be nothing to them any more. They had met as ships meet on the ocean, but ere long each would fade out of sight of the other. Then he would be quite forgotten, and more friendless than ever. He was nothing now to anybody; even his dead did not need him, though 'for ever and for ever he would need them.'

At that moment when existence seemed most cold and cheerless there fell upon his ear the strains of 'God the Lord passed by,' with which Madge had that day played out the sparse congregation of St. Paul's.

'Was there ever anything so fine composed?' he thought in church, and the music sounded even more spiritual as it broke the stillness of the silent house and swept aside the sordid aims, the petty prospects, to which Selwyn had been listening. Higher and higher swelled the song, till it culminated in that magnificent outpouring of rejoicing and praise :

'Holy is God the Lord ;'

and the listener, dropping his pencil, sat enwrapped in the glorious sounds, which came like a message from a better world.

Mr. Trosdale watched his Assistant narrowly.

‘I did not know Madge had come in,’ he said, not without a touch of irritation. ‘Should you not like to go upstairs? You are looking tired. My stupid details have proved wearisome.’

Selwyn denied being tired, and declared he had enjoyed Mr. Trosdale’s conversation enormously; but added, a little wistfully :

‘Perhaps Miss Trosdale does not care to be disturbed when she is playing.’

‘I rather suspect Miss Trosdale likes an audience,’ replied Madge’s father cynically. ‘However, we will see.’

And so saying, he motioned Selwyn to precede him out of the dining-room and followed his guest upstairs.

Madge had just ended as they entered. Her fingers were on the final chords, and her face still wore the rapt look of one whose eyes have caught a glimpse into paradise.

For a second Selwyn did not speak ; but, as she turned, he went over beside her and said :

‘ That is exquisite.’

‘ Do you think so ?’ she asked, and her voice had in it a dreamy softness he never heard before.

‘ Yes, I do,’ Selwyn answered. ‘ I thought to-day in church it was the loveliest thing I ever listened to ; but, somehow, it sounds different to-night.’

‘ Not so lovely ?’ and she smiled a little sadly.

‘ Quite ; but there is something in it now I failed to catch this morning. Perhaps I understand it better.’

‘ No ; I played it better. I always do play better when I am alone.’

‘ I told your father I was afraid we should disturb you,’ said Selwyn, feeling his old shyness returning in all its acute misery.

‘ That is not what I meant. All I intended to say was, I can play better when I do not feel anxious about the matter—in other words, when I am not nervous. Perhaps it sounds strange to imply that I ever am nervous ; but

I assure you the slip the choir made in the anthem to-day caused me to fail in everything I attempted afterwards.'

'You did not fail in anything,' said Selwyn; and then wondered at his own courage.

She shook her head.

'I am glad you like "God the Lord passed by,"' she added, as she absently turned the leaves of the 'Elijah.'

'I think from "Night falleth around me" to the end of "Holy is God the Lord," the finest portion of the whole oratorio.'

'Perhaps—I am very fond of "Thanks be to God, he laveth the thirsty land."' And she struck the opening bars of that choral.

'Do you really not sing, Miss Trosdale?'

'I rarely do sing, for my voice is very poor.'

'I wish you would sing for me.'

'Do you?—then I will.' And without another word she played a few chords and began Liszt's setting of 'Du bist wie eine Blume.'

She was right; she had not much voice, but there was that in it which, like her play-

ing, stirred the deepest depths of Selwyn's soul.

The simple song touched him so much that he could scarcely thank the singer.

‘You have a great love of music,’ she said.

‘And I cannot play a note.’

‘That is strange,’ she remarked.

‘Does it seem so to you? And yet when a man admires beautiful scenery no one is surprised that he is unable to draw. Sometimes I fancy people who are entranced with an effect are happier than those who have knowledge of each detail which goes to produce the effect.’

‘They may be. Still, I think I should like best to know a great deal about the details.’

‘And as for me, I am afraid it is a case of sour grapes,’ answered Selwyn.

‘Madge, are we to have no supper to-night?’ broke in Mr. Trosdale, who had for some time been moving restlessly about the room. ‘Been ready for an hour and more! Then why could you not have said so? Fact is,’ he added *sotto voce* to Selwyn, as they went downstairs, ‘she forgets everything when she sits down to the piano.’

‘I should not care what she forgot, if she would only be kind and pleasant as she is to-night,’ thought Selwyn. And it really seemed, for a few days, as if his wish was about to be granted.

Miss Trosdale was amiability itself. She stayed more at home, she talked to Selwyn, she played for him, she sang for him, she listened to his memories of his old home. Mr. Trosdale could not secure half so much of the young man’s society as he desired. Nevertheless, the drawings progressed, and there was as much conversation about patents, the blast furnace, and all the elegant trifles Third Liverpool had thrown off like sparks, as any man need have wished.

The days flew by as no days had done since Selwyn came to Liverpool, and it was the 2nd of January, 1880. A new year had come, and he stood by the window sorrowfully considering that he must soon go back to Mrs. Wells and Everton, when Mr. Trosdale crossed over to the window too.

‘A miserable place and a wretched look out,’ he said, in severe disparagement of St. Paul’s Square.

‘I shall always think of it as a beautiful place with a magnificent view,’ answered Selwyn. ‘I have been so happy here.’

‘I wish you would stay here then.’

‘I have already paid a most unconscionable visit,’ hesitated Selwyn, wondering if he were about to be pressed to lengthen that visit still further.

‘If you really are comfortable under this roof’ [‘If!’ repeated Selwyn under his breath] ‘I wish you would come and live with us. No—do not make any answer now. Think the proposal—which I make in all seriousness—over for four-and-twenty hours, and then tell me whether there is any just cause or impediment why you should not install yourself here. I imagine you must be sometimes lonely in your lodgings, and I am often lonely too; for even when my daughter is at home she is not the companion she might be. You have seen our home—it is never different. To-morrow, then——’

‘No, now,’ said Selwyn hurriedly. ‘There is nothing I should like better than to stay here; but I cannot intrude on your hospitality for ever, and——’

‘Put the matter on a commercial footing, if you like,’ interrupted Mr. Trosdale. ‘If you are too proud to live here as my guest, live here as my lodger. Pay me something—twenty pounds a year say.’

‘My rooms alone cost me double that at present.’

‘Then they cost you far too much,’ remarked Mr. Trosdale. ‘However, think the matter over; and, if you believe you could be happy here, we will arrange the £ s. d. question to our mutual satisfaction. Now it is high time you were at the office. I cannot go there for an hour or two yet.’

‘I suppose Mr. Serle will not be back to-night?’ said Madge, entering the room five minutes after Selwyn had left the house. ‘I see he has packed his portmanteau.’

‘I have asked him to stay for a little while longer,’ answered Mr. Trosdale, looking undauntedly at his daughter, who, though she seemed a good deal surprised at this intelligence, made no comment except ‘Oh!’

‘I wish you would not be so satirical, Madge,’ said her father.

‘I am not satirical. I am only surprised;’

after which answer neither pursued the conversation.

With a light heart Selwyn that evening unpacked his belongings. Between himself and Mr. Trosdale everything was arranged satisfactorily.

His chief had consented to take more. Selwyn, not to be outdone in that generosity which consists in putting one's pride in one's pocket, had agreed to give less. He was free now of the house in St. Paul's Square not as a visitor, but an inmate ; and kind and honest though Mrs. Wells might be, he found the change from his lonely rooms and solitary meals almost too pleasant to be real.

With what ardour he devoted himself to the drawings of the blast furnace, with what zealous care he brought out all the details, how sedulously he studied accuracy to the merest fraction of an inch, need scarcely be chronicled here. He threw his whole heart and soul into the invention ; he listened with intense interest while Mr. Trosdale dilated on its innumerable merits. He heard Mr. Ashford was financing money to float the scheme, and restrained his tongue from any

injurious remarks about that gentleman. He wrote letters beautifully vague at Mr. Trosdale's dictation by night, and ran errands for him by day : in a word, no paid clerk would have done badly what Selwyn did well for nothing. He toiled at the office for his principal, who was often compulsorily absent, and he toiled out of the office for his kind friend, who was good enough to take him into confidence concerning every difficulty that came in his way.

Yet he was most happy, and his constant cheerfulness at last seemed to produce an effect even on Madge.

She took an interest in his reading, which at that time related chiefly to iron and the processes used to convert it into 'pigs.' She borrowed from him the classics of Mr. S. Smiles, with which he had only lately become acquainted, and also perused another work she found on his dressing-table, entitled, 'Unappreciated Geniuses.'

'Are you about to join the great body of inventors, Mr. Serle?' she asked one day, when he was poring over the *Scientific American*.

‘I!’ he repeated, in amazement. ‘Why, I could not invent anything were it to save my life.’

‘What a blessing!’ she exclaimed.

‘But I can admire people who are cleverer than myself.’

‘I suppose so. You are at an age when hero-worship is natural, and probably laudable. It is a disease, however, and I wish you well over it.’

But if there were no inventors, Miss Trosdale——’

‘With all my heart I wish there were none.’

Selwyn would have liked to argue this point with her, as he would have liked to argue many others, but she was so decided—so dogmatic, her father said—that argument proved difficult.

Still, for a time she was very pleasant, spite of her antagonism. Then a change came over her which the young man could only ascribe to caprice or temper.

‘Are you not very well, Miss Trosdale?’ he asked one day, when she had been more than usually ungracious.

For a moment she looked at him in surprise, like a person awakened from sleep; then she left the room without a word.

Her father was manifestly discomposed by these moods, and perpetually urged Selwyn to take no notice of them: 'It is only her way,' he explained.

'But I am afraid my being here annoys your daughter. I had better go. I am sure I had far better return to Everton,' he said one evening.

'You had better do nothing of the sort. Madge would miss you as much as anyone. She likes you greatly. I know she does.'

Selwyn thought if so, she had a very strange mode of showing her attachment. He felt greatly hurt. She had that day refused his offer to fetch her some trifle she wanted from town; snubbed him when he returned to tea carrying a roll of music he had ordered for her from London; and rose from table before the meal was half finished, saying she must go over to St. Paul's.

'Never mind her,' advised Mr. Trosdale. 'I never mind her.'

But Selwyn could not help minding her ; and he lit a cigar and went out to try if a stroll round the square would calm his ruffled feelings.

For nearly an hour he paced the flags, and yet he failed to find any comfort. It was a beautiful night : a new moon was looking down on the dingy square and beautifying it, the graveyard seemed weird and strange, while in the old church the tones of the organ rose and fell, soared and sank low, wakening in the young man's heart a terrible pain.

‘Why does she hurt me so?’ he marvelled. ‘What pleasure can she find in making me miserable?’ and he stood still for a moment, trying to solve the riddle of a woman's mind. ‘I will not trouble Mr. Trosdale with the matter. I will have it out with her this night ;’ and throwing the cigar he had just lighted away, he strode round the square till he came to the gate through which she was wont to pass.

As he reached it, he met the organ-blower returning from his labours.

‘Has Miss Trosdale gone home?’ he asked the lad, who knew him.

‘No, sir ; she’s inside. She said she did not want me any more. She’s just putting away the music.’

In the clear moonlight Selwyn stood waiting for the girl, but she did not come. The organ had been silent for full ten minutes, and yet the player failed to appear. Selwyn walked up to the door, and pushing it open, entered the church. All was silent as the dead sleeping around, and the intruder caught the spirit of the stillness. What could Madge be doing in that lonely building, in the solemn mystical moonlight, all alone ?

Quietly he stepped into the nave, his foot-falls making no echo ; he looked towards the organ, but it was closed, and the candles were out. Where could she be ? A great apprehension filled his heart. What could have happened ? He would have spoken her name aloud, but that he felt afraid of the sound of his own voice. He turned and peered hither and thither irresolute, when all at once his eye fell on something dark kneel-

ing before the communion rails. It was Madge. A shaft of moonlight coming through one of the windows flooded the pavement just behind her, and showed the bowed figure, the face buried in the hands, in a very abandonment, as it seemed, of grief.

As he paused for the moment transfixed, Selwyn heard the faint sound of sobbing. Then he made his way stealthily from the church, closed the door noiselessly, and passed out into the night, pierced to the soul.

What was this grief she needed to carry into God's very temple, which she could not lay down even there? He had sought her, meaning to have their quarrel out; but now, never—never—never—would he trouble her about his own petty trials.

She might flout him if she pleased, refuse his friendship, scorn his gifts, despise him because he was not rich, or great, or learned, or handsome, or renowned. He would bear any indignity she chose to put upon him, for between him and her irritable and unjust words he knew he should for ever see the

figure of a sorrowing and broken woman kneeling before her Lord.

He watched till he saw her cross the churchyard and enter her home. Then after a sufficient time had elapsed, he followed her into the house.





CHAPTER III.

MADGE ASKS A QUESTION.

SELWYN had been over five weeks in St. Paul's Square. Time passed quickly in that strange little nook. At the office nothing particular occurred during January. Mr. Kerry, of course, was in high dudgeon at the step which had been taken during his absence, and expressed his opinion concerning 'old Trosdale's' goings on in extremely forcible language.

Spite of this, however, Selwyn and he remained good friends.

'I'll never quarrel with you,' said the Irishman. 'No matter how far anybody leads you astray.'

As for the official work, it was in a greater tangle than ever. Mr. Trosdale found his

own business so difficult to manage that he had almost relinquished attempting to attend to such a mere trifle as her Majesty's. Selwyn did his best, but his best could not be regarded as excellent.

Thistlethwaite attended to nothing save by fits and starts, while Holt continued systematically to do as little as he could avoid doing.

Occasionally Mr. Kerry looked in, 'to lend a hand,' as he said, 'in sorting the cards;' but he did not visit Third Liverpool as frequently as formerly, and in good truth Selwyn did not want him.

Mr. Trosdale's affairs were becoming so completely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh that the Irishman's chatter seemed to drive him crazy. How soon would the incomparable furnace be revealed to an admiring public?—when would its inventor receive some portion of those immense sums an adverse fate had for so long a time been withholding from him—when should he see his chief happy, prosperous, taking his right place among men, and enjoying the evening of life as he said he had never had the chance of doing its mid-day?

Selwyn tried to picture him wealthy, residing in a large house, having servants at his beck and call, going into general society, and in turn receiving guests. There was nothing incongruous in imagining Mr. Trosdale among such surroundings, but yet his young friend could not keep the crystal which showed these great things steady. When it shook, the scene would instantly change to St. Paul's Square—the dingy old house—the rooms he knew so well—the furniture that seemed as familiar as the chairs and tables he had been acquainted with from childhood.

Already Selwyn was experiencing, by reason of his intense sympathy with Mr. Trosdale, that heart sickness which is caused by hope deferred. Every hour, every minute, he was expecting something that never seemed to come. Day after day found his chief still waiting for Mr. Ashford, day after day found Mr. Ashford still waiting for his capitalist, who had promised to find the funds needful to present the blast-furnace to a delighted world.

Without a word being exchanged, Selwyn

learnt to know by Mr. Trosdale's fitful activity or irritable lassitude whether the news from head-quarters had been good or the reverse. Now 'the matter would be settled certainly in a week.' Again, Mr. Ashford's 'friend had been called to London, and nothing could be decided on till his return.' All this time her Majesty's money matters were attended to only by fits and starts. Piles of letters accumulated. Complaints from Somerset House were incessant. Papers which demanded immediate attention were thrust into drawers and forgotten ; indignant ratepayers called again and again to see the Surveyor, who was always absent, and Selwyn felt distracted between his anxiety about the patent on the one hand, and his consciousness that the work was more behind than any work could ever have been before.

On one dreary afternoon in February he was alone in the office, feeling particularly depressed. He was thinking of that fiendish blast-furnace, and the authorities at Somerset House, and a peculiarly irate member of that large and offensive family, the general public, who had just left him after some disagree-

able remarks, when Mr. Trosdale hurriedly entered. The Surveyor looked haggard, almost wild, threw his hat on the table with such force that it spun to the edge, and then, flinging himself into his arm-chair and spreading his arms over the desk, laid his head down upon them and groaned aloud.

‘For God’s sake, sir, tell me what has happened!’ entreated Selwyn, trembling in every limb.

‘The worst!’ answered Mr. Trosdale, without looking up.

‘The worst!’ repeated Selwyn mechanically.

‘Yes. After keeping me knocking from post to pillar all this time, that fool—that dolt—that scoundrel—that ruffian, refuses to advance a penny.’

Mr. Trosdale lifted his head as he spoke, and Selwyn saw his face flushed with rage, and streaked as if by the white fingers of disappointment and despair. ‘I may as well die at once,’ he continued. ‘I cannot struggle on any longer; no man has made a braver fight, but fate is too much for me. The sooner I am under the sod the better,’ and he let his head fall again.

It was dreadful to see him sitting thus hopeless and beaten ; his disordered gray hair gave an additional pathos to his attitude.

The grief of age is always more heart-rending to witness than the sorrow of youth, and Selwyn felt everything which was generous and tender in his nature touched by the sight before him.

‘Do not give way,’ he entreated. ‘Bear up a little longer.’

‘Why should I bear up any longer?’ asked Mr. Trosdale, without changing his attitude. ‘Why should I not give up, when there is nothing to hope for—nothing left but despair?’

‘Is it a large sum of money that you need?’ ventured the younger man, who had always before feared to put any question which might savour of impertinent curiosity.

‘What is the use of asking? The sum needed would seem a trifle to many—it would once to me ; but I might as well require ten times the amount—it would be just as easy to get.’

‘Do not think me intrusive—indeed I do not mean to be so ; but I have a little money, and——’

Mr. Trosdale laughed scornfully.

‘Five pounds, perhaps?’ he said. ‘Thank you; but I am afraid all you have been able to save out of the salary the Somerset House wiseacres consider sufficient to secure efficient men would not help me much.’

‘I have more than five pounds,’ answered Selwyn; ‘not through any saving or good management of my own. I have nearly four hundred, and you are welcome to the half or more if it is any good.’

He was not prepared for the effect these few words produced.

The Surveyor lifted his head, withdrew his arms from the desk, and stammered out:

‘This—is not a jest? You are not joking, are you?’

‘Joking?’ repeated Selwyn, horror-stricken at the suggestion. ‘I hope you do not think I could jest at such a time.’

‘I—I did not know,’ answered Mr. Trosdale. ‘I have been so constantly disappointed—I have been so tried. Ashford’s tidings were such a blow to me, and then the revolution. I—couldn’t——’ and the man covered his face with his hands and burst into tears.

Selwyn stood silent, genuinely shocked. He did not know what to say or what to do and he was cudgelling his brains to devise some word of comfort when Mr. Trosdale, dashing the tears from his eyes, exclaimed :

‘ I’m a fool ! What an ass you must think me ; but the blow this morning was too much for me, and I am faint and weak.’

‘ I saw you ate no breakfast, and I am afraid you have had nothing since.’

‘ No. Ashford’s news was food enough for one day—more than enough.’

‘ But you will take food now ?’ urged the young man. ‘ Let me send Tom for a chop.’

With a gesture Mr. Trosdale negatived Selwyn’s sensible proposal.

‘ How soon can you get this money ?’ he asked, with feverish impatience. He was like a ravenous man, too hungry even to say ‘ thank you ’ for the bread he clutched.

‘ In a few days,’ was the answer.

‘ Then it is not in Liverpool ?’

‘ No, it is in the Funds ; I must write to my uncle’s solicitor to get it for me.’

‘ He will not let you have it.’

‘ He cannot help letting me have it.’

Mr. Trosdale laid a hand on his arm, and looked at him with anxious, craving eyes.

‘If you fail me,’ he said, ‘I shall die.’

‘I won’t fail you.’

‘And you will write now—this minute?’

‘I will; but you must first let me send Tom for a chop.’

‘No—write—write—I will eat afterwards, when I know the letter is posted.’

‘Do you think two hundred will be enough?’ asked Selwyn, as he took out note-paper and envelopes.

‘Ample, ample! Make haste and finish, some one may come in and disturb us.’

Thus entreated, Selwyn dashed off a few hurried lines, saying he had immediate need of the amount, and begging Mr. Kershaw to send it to him without delay.

‘What have you said?’ inquired Mr. Trosdale.

For answer, Selwyn gave him the letter.

‘I am going out; I will drop it in the box,’ remarked the Surveyor, rising as he spoke; ‘I always intended you should have some benefit out of my invention; but now I will give you half the profits.’

‘I do not want any profit,’ cried his Assistant; ‘I won’t take a penny. As for this money, I am thankful I have it to lend to you.’

‘If you had only thought of it before, what a world of anxiety you might have spared me!’

‘I am sorry, Mr. Trosdale; but indeed I had not the smallest idea that such a sum would be of any use to you.’

‘It only means success, and success means life,’ after which exhaustive summing up the Surveyor went to have his chop, while Selwyn, flushed with the consciousness that he had quite accidentally done his chief a great service, made an onslaught on the standing crop of her Majesty’s arrears with a lighter heart than he had carried in his bosom for many a day.

‘What has occurred to put my father in such good spirits?’ asked Madge that evening, when she and Selwyn were left for a few minutes alone.

‘He knows that he will have money very shortly to secure his furnace.’

‘Is that it? I am so sorry.’

‘Will you forgive my saying, Miss Tros-

dale, that I think you do not understand all that means to your father?' Selwyn's tone was judicial, even stern. He had been long desirous of helping forward the course of reform which he felt sure would render Madge herself much happier. He was willing to condone any misconception on the part of this incomprehensible girl towards himself; but he felt the attitude she assumed when the invention lying close to her father's heart was mentioned deserved every reprobation. The young lady, however, did not seem to view matters in the same light.

'I have known my father longer than you, Mr. Serle,' she remarked with a contemptuous smile. 'However, we need not discuss the matter; you are glad apparently, and I am sorry: that is all there is to be said at present.'

Her words were like a cold wave flowing over the sunny strand of Selwyn's enthusiasm. Whenever he woke during the night, and he woke often, it was not the idea of Mr. Trosdale's recovered cheerfulness, but Madge's dissatisfaction, which recurred to him. It seemed so unnatural for a daughter not to

sympathize with her father, that he felt more puzzled than ever as he viewed the width and depth of the gulf that evidently separated them. If he, a comparative stranger, felt so deeply interested in all Mr. Trosdale's designs, was it not marvellous to find that the same plans divided him from his only child? And after having considered this problem till he fell into uneasy sleep, Selwyn would wake again with a vague feeling of everything in his life having gone wrong oppressing him.

He did not hear from Mr. Kershaw by return of post ; instead, he received a letter from Sea Court which grieved and annoyed him greatly. The lawyer failed to answer his request for money with a remittance ; on the contrary, he went to Mr. Adams and laid Selwyn's application before the oldest and kindest friend that young man possessed.

'The poor boy has got into bad hands,' was the Squire's comment.

'I am afraid he has fallen into bad courses,' amended the solicitor,

'And I thought we could trust him so fully!' sighed the Squire.

‘It is evident he is in trouble of some sort,’ answered the solicitor.

‘No lad was more carefully brought up. I had the most perfect faith in his honour and prudence. I never felt a moment’s anxiety about him.’

‘Young men will be young men,’ replied Mr. Kershaw.

‘Yes ; but they need not be bad young men,’ retorted the Squire ; to which the other answered nothing.

‘I thought I had better see you before sending the money,’ went on the lawyer, after a pause. ‘Of course, if he insists on having it, no one can prevent his doing what he likes with his own.’

‘I will write myself,’ said Mr. Adams ; and he did write, just such a letter as a loving father might pen to a son he feared had gone astray. ‘Whatever the trouble may be,’ he said, ‘tell me, and I will help you to the best of my ability. I will advance the money myself, if it be absolutely imperative to pay such a sum ; but when I think how hard the little hoard which you have at command was gathered, the self-denial each pound repre-

sents, my heart feels very sore and sorry for you and the unselfish dead. My boy, no matter how far you have gone wrong, it is never too late to turn back. Think of those who loved you much and are gone. Consider your own future, which it is for you to make or mar, and be wise. Say what you want such a large sum of money for, and let me advise you. I will not judge you harshly. You were young and inexperienced to be thrown all alone into the wickedness of a wicked town ; but I thought your dead mother's prayers would be a shield to you.' And thus, with a little more to the same effect, this faithful friend ended a letter which it cost him much grief to write.

Never in his short life had Selwyn felt so shocked and annoyed. The view Mr. Adams took was so natural, it could not arouse indignation ; yet the very fact that he had been cruelly misjudged cut the young fellow to the heart.

'What a world this is, in which the worst thought always occurs first,' he considered ; and then, even before the red flush had faded from his face or his hand was quite steady,

he wrote assuring Mr. Adams that he was utterly mistaken. 'I have got into no mess,' he said; 'I have not gone wrong. I want this money to lend to a friend, who has need of it for an honourable purpose; and I entreat of you to believe that I am telling you the simple truth.'

By the same post he repeated his request to Mr. Kershaw in somewhat peremptory terms, with the result that within a week he was enabled to hand a draft for two hundred pounds to the expectant Surveyor. But the letter which enclosed that draft from his late uncle's solicitor was couched in the coldest and most formal terms, whilst the tone of Mr. Adams' answer to his earnest protest told him he had contrived to estrange one whose kindness never failed, and whose acquaintance was an honour.

The Squire, while 'not presuming to advise,' felt it only his duty to say plainly :

'That any man who could ask such a youth in Selwyn's position to lend him so large a sum of money must be either a reckless spendthrift or a designing rogue.'

As he read, Selwyn looked across at Mr.

Trosdale, and smiled to consider how mistaken the Squire was.

‘When the furnace is well before the world I will tell Mr. Adams all about it, and show him how utterly he has misjudged us both;’ and he hinted, when he replied, at a speedy explanation, which would put everything right; to which the Squire’s rejoinder was very brief:

‘Experience has taught me that a mystery means either folly or sin. I do not blame you; but I feel quite certain you are being duped. We must each, however, pay in some shape or other for our education in the world’s school. I hope you may get off with two hundred pounds, though I doubt it.’

Nothing could be harder or more unreasonable than this letter, Selwyn felt, and at the same time more hopeless to answer. If a man will not see with your eyes, where is the oculist who can make him do so?

Already this moral blindness, which afflicts so many people, was causing him annoyance. Madge, Mr. Kerry, Mr. Adams, Mr. Kershaw, could not be persuaded that his vision alone was accurate. It was most trying, and

naturally his sympathies were fully aroused for himself as well as for Mr. Trosdale.

When one knows one is right, it proves very hurtful to be thought in the wrong, and the only balm Selwyn could find to soothe the wounds inflicted by his unbelieving and too-zealous friends was the approaching triumph of the furnace, destined to eclipse all other furnaces. Had he been offered the choice, he would no doubt have preferred that some greater, grander, nobler invention had occurred to his chief.

Something very beautiful or very wonderful; something on all fours with telegraphy, or electricity, or steam, or aërial navigation, would have seemed a much finer matter than a prosaic furnace, which only professed to do better what had been done well enough before by plenty of other people. He believed in the furnace implicitly, though he did not understand its peculiarities in the least. Perhaps he believed in it all the more because of his very incompetence to criticise. It was to save fuel, and yet to produce a greater heat than any in use; but as Selwyn was not a manufacturer, the saving of coal and the

production of heat did not appeal to his heart so much as such matters ought. He was still young and foolish, and a flying-machine would have charmed his fancy much more than any heating apparatus ever invented ; but he checked his mind when it went off on any such discontented wanderings.

‘ I am like Naaman, the Syrian,’ he thought (it will be perceived that association with Madge was already producing its natural effect), ‘ wanting large means used when little will serve the purpose better. After all, so long as Mr. Trosdale is rich and happy, what can the nature of his invention signify ? And I shall have helped him to success. How rejoiced I ought to feel.’

But had he searched his heart, he would have found that rejoicing was far from him ; that unrest had taken the place of content ; that anxiety watched beside his pillow ; and that a continual uncertainty seemed to walk with him by day, and lie down with him at night.

The whole weight of the office lay on him. It was with difficulty he could get Mr. Trosdale to attend to important matters, or extract sufficient information to enable some

pressing duty to be performed in even the most perfunctory manner.

For the first time also since his arrival in Liverpool his health really failed. He missed the walk to and fro his lodgings. He spent so much time in Mr. Trosdale's close unhealthy den at St. Paul's Square that he began to lose appetite and vigour. He lay awake so long at night considering the fiendish pranks enacted by everyone who touched the furnace, that he did not feel inclined to leave his bed when the hour came for him to rise. A nervous irritability with which he was often seized seemed scarcely less trying than the causeless despair that made him occasionally take very dark views of life, and especially of his own future in the tax-office.

'I knew how it would be,' Mr. Kerry remarked one day. 'Trosdale's changing you as the fairies change the babies, and it is sore my heart is to see the wreck he is making of you.'

'What do you mean?' asked Selwyn pettishly. 'I have a cold, and so have you, and so has everybody in the office. Is there any

miracle in that? The miracle would be if we had not colds.'

Mr. Kerry shook his head. 'There's many a sort of cold,' he remarked oracularly, and departed.

Selwyn's cold certainly was bad. It made him feel ill all over. He ached from head to foot, and was in that state of mind and body when even a slight contradiction seems the last straw added to an already heavy burden. It had been arranged that he was on that afternoon to take the detective duty in which Holt and Thistlethwaite alone delighted; but as Selwyn looked out on a muddy pavement and a downpour of rain, he said to himself: 'No one shall catch me roaming about the town on such an errand in weather like this,' and turned again to the pile of work that lay beside him.

He had intended also, when he left St. Paul's Square, to go to the theatre in search of a change of some sort, and it was understood that he would not return for tea; but, as time wore on, he knew he felt as little inclined to go pleasuring as to go testing the depths of mendacity that can be plumbed by

sundry of her Majesty's lieges when acquiescence in the assessment of her Majesty's taxes is in progress.

'Not going to the play after all?' cried Mr. Kerry, meeting him in the corridor; 'and I have just put old Simpkins off till to-morrow (I told you he was coming in to have a pipe with me), that I might be free to see the fun myself.'

'There's nothing to hinder *your* seeing the fun, that I know of,' answered Selwyn, 'only I won't go to any theatre this evening.'

'Where will you go then?'

'To bed,' retorted the other.

'Do; and wrap your feet up in a flannel petticoat, and rub your nose with the grease of a tallow candle, and take a stiff glass of hot grog with butter in it—and——'

'Confound you, Kerry! Can't you see I am ill?'

'I see you've a bad pain in your temper; and I don't know but that's the worst ailment of all ailments man or woman can be laid up with.'

'Settle the question for yourself. I am

in no mood to discuss it,' retorted Selwyn, driven to the verge of frenzy.

'Well, you have my best prayers. Sure, they won't hurt you.'

So far from accepting this offer in a good spirit, Mr. Serle made a very naughty reply—a reply so naughty, indeed, that subsequently he felt ashamed to recall it. When he got rid of his cold, and found himself again in a right frame of mind, he could not but agree with 'Pet Margory's' dictum on a somewhat similar occasion, that he had used a word no young gentleman should allow to pass his lips.

He was far too hot and angry at the time, however, to do anything save elbow Mr. Kerry—who had planted himself in the middle of the passage—to one side, and flee through the filthy, wretched streets—and oh! how filthy and miserable the Liverpool streets can be—to St. Paul's Square, as if to a City of Refuge, though it were 'but a little one.'

There, however, he was doomed to disappointment. For the first time in his experience Mr. Trosdale's house wore no look of welcome. On the contrary, it might

have been any house—any one, in fact, of the ten hundred thousand houses that never seem to smile a welcome to living being.

He opened the door with a latch-key Mr. Trosdale had given him, and went into the sitting-room.

The fire had been just made up, to last evidently for hours ; it shone red through the two lower bars, but above towered a huge mass of black coal. The gas was turned low ; no table spread for tea ; no kettle singing cheerily on the hob ; no smell of fat muffin, slim crumpet, homely scone or luxurious sally lunn ; no little whet, such as Mr. Trosdale loved, in the way of potted shrimps or char, pickled salmon, or more delicate pâté.

Instead, there was utter despair—the blackness of desolation. Selwyn took the situation in at a glance. Probably he could not have enjoyed society if there had been society to enjoy, or eaten food if he had found a feast prepared ; but the fact that he could have neither did not tend to make him look more cheerfully at existence.

When he told Mr. Kerry he meant to

return home and go to bed, he spoke the literal truth. At the office bed had offered a very inviting prospect ; here, however, where nothing else presented itself, bed did not seem so captivating. As he toiled slowly up the stairs—his cold was of that not uncommon description which adds, apparently, tons to the weight of a human body, particularly as regards the limbs—he thought what a fool he had been to say anything about going to the theatre and not coming back to tea.

‘ I wonder where Mr. Trosdale has gone,’ he thought, looking into the drawing-room, where some glowing embers told a fine fire had been. ‘ Ah ! this is better,’ going over to the hearth and sinking into an easy-chair. ‘ I’ll just sit down and warm myself, and then turn in,’ and with a feeling of content he leaned back and, without ‘ turning in,’ fell asleep.

He slept as it seemed to him for hours, though in reality the time might have been counted by minutes, and but few even of those. He dreamed he was again at his uncle’s cottage, overlooking the sea, across which there fell that light we never behold

in our waking moments. It was a lovely summer's morn, and as he stood feasting his eyes on the remembered scene, he felt the heat of the mid-day sun stealing into his chilled frame and diffusing a delightful warmth.

Along the path leading from the house he saw afar off his uncle advancing towards him—just as he had seen his relative a hundred, hundred times in the happy days that in waking reality could return—ah ! never more.

The old man came nearer and nearer, unchanged in gait and carriage—his silvery hair stirred by the light wind, a smile of ineffable content on his calm face answering Selwyn's cry of, 'I am so glad to be back ; I have been so lonely !' Then in the sunshine they stood together, hand clasped in hand, looking each into the other's eyes, till some voice exclaiming 'Mr. Serle' made Selwyn start, and so awake.

For a moment he felt dazed ; the spell of his dream still held thrall over him, and he could not at first remember where he was. The fire had not quite burnt out, but the room was dark, save for a gleam of light

which came through the door Selwyn had omitted to close when he entered.

No one was beside him, no one was speaking to him ; but on the landing two persons were talking.

‘What is it you want to know about Mr. Serle, Madge?’ asked Mr. Trosdale, in answer to his daughter.

Selwyn grasped the arms of his chair, and was about to rise out of its cosy depths when Madge spoke again, and said :

‘I want to know how long he is going to stay here.’

Her tone was sharp and irritable, and passed into the young man’s heart as a bullet might have done.

‘How long is he going to stay?’ Mr. Trosdale’s voice was deprecating. It seemed impossible to disturb the conference now.

‘He came here to spend Christmas-week,’ pursued Miss Trosdale, ‘and he has stayed here ever since, and we are now in the middle of February. Does he mean to stop with us always?’

‘Do you object to his stopping, Madge?’

‘I objected to his coming, and I object to his staying,’ was the uncompromising reply.

‘I am afraid you will have to get over your objection then,’ returned Mr. Trosdale, evidently waxing wroth.

‘Why, what do you mean?’

‘That he is going to stay here altogether.’

‘Are you serious?’

‘Perfectly ; I never was more serious in my life.’

‘Then, papa,’ said Madge, and a curious change came over her manner, which was now as quiet and determined as it had been before angry, ‘you must manage the house for yourself, for I can do so no longer. I have worked hard, I have denied myself the smallest luxury. I have saved every penny I could save, to make you comfortable and to keep out of debt ; but I will not work, or deny myself, or save for Mr. Serle.’ And having delivered this manifesto she was turning to go downstairs when Mr. Trosdale detained her.

‘Wait a minute, Madge—what is it you want?’

‘ I want what I seem never likely to have, some ease of mind.’

‘ Pooh !’ returned her father, ‘ you know it is useless talking in that way to me.’

‘ How am I to talk then ?’ she retorted.

‘ Just now, please to condescend to particulars, and tell me the special form which you wish what you call ease of mind to assume.’

‘ Money !’ answered the girl defiantly.

‘ Money ! of course, I might have known, it is always money with you.’

‘ It is always money with everyone who has to pay tradespeople and maintain a decent appearance on almost nothing. However, I need not trouble you further ; we can revert to the old plan which worked so admirably, and——’

‘ We will do no such thing,’ interrupted Mr. Trosdale in a rage ; ‘ do you imagine that with my mind occupied as it is I am going to be harassed by baker and butcher, and all the fry of duns that swarm around a house as flies do about treacle ? Clearly understand while you live with me you will continue to act as my housekeeper, and you will be civil to Mr. Serle.’

‘I must have more to keep the house on then,’ she retorted; ‘and as for Mr. Serle, if he is to live here he ought to pay. We are not in a position to board a young man for nothing.’

‘Perhaps you would like us to set up as lodging-house keepers.’

‘I should not mind in the least.’

‘Great heavens!’ exclaimed Mr. Trosdale, ‘was ever man so afflicted as I am, first by my wife, then by my daughter?’

‘Stop!’ interposed Madge; ‘say what you please about or to me; but do not speak of my mother. I know what a wife she was. I know all the bitterness of the life she led so uncomplainingly. I will not have her name brought into any matter between us; and as for Mr. Serle, if you have really asked him to stay here indefinitely, you *must* give me more money, that is quite certain. Things cannot, and shall not, go on any longer as they have been doing.’

‘Oh, dear me, dear me!’ moaned Mr. Trosdale; ‘am I never to know the meaning of the word “peace”?’

If this question were addressed to his

daughter, she did not vouchsafe any answer ; instead, she walked defiantly downstairs, across the hall, and out of the house.

Next minute Mr. Trosdale followed her example, and Selwyn found himself alone.

He was wide enough awake now, and yet his happy dream that came to him in blessed sleep seemed more real than this blighting trouble with which he tried to wrestle in full possession of his faculties.

He stood in the middle of the room feeling like one bereft of reason—was he going crazy ?—had he imagined it all ?—could such things really have been said about him ?—could it be that he had sat and listened to the story of his own shame spoken aloud, and that by Madge ? *He* an unwelcome guest ; *he* staying on in a house when he was not wanted ; *he* eating bread earned by a girl ; *he* putting an additional burden on her ; *he* a bone of contention between parent and child ! He would go ; he would go that minute ; he would not even stop to pack his things—he would put up at an hotel for the night—he would write a line to Mr. Trosdale, and send it by a porter. The house seemed to choke him ; the

scent of the rose-leaves and the musk and the lavender made him feel faint and giddy ; he stepped out on to the landing, which was empty as his own heart, went down the stairs he never again meant to ascend, and passed out into the night.

Grim and solitary lay the lonely church-yard, where the forgotten dead were sleeping, around St. Paul's, lighted up for evening service.

Madge was gone there ; in a minute more he could have heard the organ pealing forth had he not fled from the Square. He forgot his cold—languor and weariness seemed to have dropped from him like a heavy mantle laid aside ; he did not feel the rain pouring in torrents, or notice that the men and women he met looked strangely at him as he pressed forward to a phantom goal through the darkness.





CHAPTER IV.

A COMPACT.

THOUGH he often subsequently tried to recall where his weary feet wandered on that night, Selwyn never could precisely remember the route he took, the long and devious ways he traversed.

All he ever felt sure of in after days was that, wet and disreputable, he had pushed open the swing doors of a great hotel, and, after one dazzled moment, slunk back ashamed to enter, and that then, after hovering close to the heart of Liverpool till the noise of its ceaseless throbbing seemed to drive him distracted, he struck out, with some vague idea of finding quiet, for the country, which he never reached.

He passed through dreary streets—walked mile after mile—the docks lying to his left, and the distant sand-hills far on in front, with the rain-swept air growing colder and colder, and the health-giving smell of the sea becoming stronger at each step he took ; the noise of the town getting fainter, and the silence of the suburbs deeper—till at length, with a chill like that of death on him, he stopped suddenly. It was then he ‘came to himself,’ and knew he literally had not a dry thread of clothing on him, and was fagged out.

The rain was, for the time being, over—the change in the night might have been one of the causes tending to sober Selwyn’s fevered brain. The wind blew keen and raw, and he shivered like one in an ague fit as he stood, with reason restored to him as it comes back to a man after delirium.

‘What am I doing here?’ he thought, and then, for the first time, the height and length and depth of his own impulsive folly began to perplex him.

The darkness, the loneliness, the horrible cold, were so real as to thrust his mental grievance for the time into the background.

What was he doing there, indeed? Subjecting himself to a risk of the most serious illness—putting himself to well-nigh inconceivable discomfort—fretting himself almost out of his senses, and all because a girl, who had never been over-civil to him, said he ought to do what he was doing, namely, pay for his board.

How absurd it all seemed when reduced to facts! What was there in such simple words to send him forth into the night as though possessed? Something had been wrong with him all day. Now he came to consider, he could not leave Mr. Trosdale's house with such discourtesy. He must leave it, of course, eventually—making some excuse perhaps—because he ought not to widen the wide breach between father and daughter. Why had not Mr. Trosdale said he paid—though little? It was not with any good will of his the amount chanced to be small. He would think it all out quietly. He would not rush off to an hotel. He would sleep on the matter—second thoughts were always best.

It must be getting very late. He wondered where he could meet with a convey-

ance. Perhaps, though, he had better walk, for he was drenched and cold—cold. How tired he felt ! No one but an idiot would have acted in such a fashion. And so thinking he turned back, now dozing as he walked, again starting, awake, to find himself in unfamiliar streets—still getting nearer and nearer to Liverpool, where the lights were not so many or the noise so great as when he left it ; on past the docks ; on between great rows of lofty warehouses that seemed to frown darkly as he passed through the misery and squalor and vice, the aspect of which he knew too well—and then, at last, one turn which brought him into St. Paul's Square. His fingers were so stiff and numbed he could scarcely feel his latch-key ; he made two futile attempts to open the door, but at last succeeded. After many hours he was in light and warmth again. How pleasant the very air of the house felt—how bright and cheery the dining-room looked as Mr. Trosdale came out with a smile and a welcoming ' Back again, Serle ? ' which changed the next instant to ' What on earth is the matter ? Where have you been ? '

As his chief put that amazed question, Selwyn saw Madge come and stand behind her father, looking at him with utter wonderment.

‘Why, Mr. Serle!’ she said, ‘is it possible you have been out in the rain without an overcoat or umbrella?’

Selwyn looked round, as if an umbrella and an overcoat might have been expected to follow him into the hall.

‘I forgot them,’ he answered, in such a dazed way that Mr. Trosdale might be excused for thinking what he really did think.

‘You had better get off your wet things and go to bed,’ he observed. ‘Here—what is all this?’ he added, catching hold of Selwyn as he reeled, and would have fallen. ‘Why, you are as wet as if you had been in the Mersey. I will help you upstairs—no good sitting down, you are only likely to get a chill.’

‘I’ll be all right in a minute,’ answered Selwyn. ‘I’m—I’m——’

‘There is something the matter, papa,’ suggested Miss Trosdale.

‘I think there is,’ agreed her father drily ;

‘a good deal the matter,’ and they both, with grave faces, contemplated Selwyn, who, utterly beaten, sat on a chair in the hall—his head leaning against the wall, his hair drenched, his cheeks white, his eyes half-closed, his mouth a little open.

‘Come,’ began Mr. Trosdale, ‘you had better make an attempt to get upstairs. I will help you—give me your hand,’ and he took Selwyn’s unresisting fingers in his only to drop them instantly. ‘Lord save me,’ he exclaimed, ‘you are like death; what has befallen you—have you been in the river?’

Selwyn shook his head and smiled faintly.

‘I shall be better in a minute,’ he murmured; ‘then I can get upstairs.’

‘Something very serious has befallen him,’ observed Miss Trosdale; ‘Ann had better go for a doctor.’

‘’Pon my word, I think it is the best thing she can do,’ agreed the Surveyor. ‘What a state he is in—I cannot imagine where he has been.’

Madge did not answer a word, but after despatching the servant for a doctor, she went to the kitchen, saw there was plenty of hot

water, ran up into Selwyn's room, laid out everything he was likely to require, turned the gas higher, and then sped downstairs again, to find her father still looking helplessly at his Assistant.

‘What do you think of him?’ she asked.

‘I don't know what to think,’ answered Mr. Trosdale, who was indeed perplexed to an extent.

‘I wish the doctor would come,’ said Madge uneasily; and even as she spoke Ann returned, almost too breathless to make it quite clear that Dr. Mangin was close at her heels.

‘He only turned back to get his instruments,’ explained the woman. ‘I hear his step now,’ and she opened the door wide to admit a cheery, jolly-faced gentleman, who even while giving his right hand to Miss Trosdale and his left to the Surveyor found time to glance at the patient and inquire:

‘What is all this?’

‘We know just as much about the matter as you do,’ answered Mr. Trosdale gloomily. ‘I left him well, save for a cold, at the office, and he returned as you see.’

‘He must have been in the water,’ said Dr. Mangin, wiping the hand with which he had touched Selwyn.

‘He may,’ answered the Surveyor, in a tone that implied nothing was impossible.

‘He lives with you, does not he?’

‘Yes, he lives here.’

‘Then let us get him up to bed—no use trying to prescribe till we have these wet clothes off. Now just keep quiet, my young friend, will you?’ he continued, addressing Selwyn, who was heavily trying to state he would be quite equal to going upstairs presently. ‘Take his feet, please, Mr. Trosdale—that is all right,’ and with the slightest nod he told Ann to follow while they carried the lad upstairs as they might had he been dead.

‘Ah! miss, dear, go and sit down,’ entreated Ann before she followed. ‘Sure you are white as a corpse. Don’t be taking on—the doctor ’ll bring him round, never you fear.’

‘Ann, Ann, he looks——’

‘I know, darling, I know; but you’re wrong. He’ll be laughing at it all after a day or two. He’ll have to lay by for a while,

but that's nothing. It is you that are troubling me. If you fall ill, what is to become of us all ?'

'I shall not fall ill. Go—go up to them, they want you.'

They did want her—to take away Selwyn's dripping clothes, to fetch hot blankets and boiling water, to kindle a fire in the drawing-room, and bring brandy, which the doctor administered to his patient, who was almost asleep, out of a teaspoon in small sips.

'I have not the faintest notion what is really the matter with him,' he said at last. 'From some cause utter exhaustion has ensued, but I think in the morning we shall find him much better. If you like I will look in through the night, but I fancy rest is all he wants. Some one had better stop up.'

'I will,' remarked Ann.

'So that if he should be worse or want anything——'

'I'll run round,' finished Ann.

'Really such a servant is a pearl of price,' decided the doctor, as he walked home, reflecting upon a case which puzzled him a

good deal. 'To-morrow I shall know more about it,' he thought.

But the morrow did not bring any great enlightenment with it. Selwyn, still heavy with sleep, very weak, hoarse as a raven, and quite unfit to get up, had no better explanation to give of his previous night's escapade than that he believed he had not rightly known what he was doing.

'I must have walked about for hours,' he said; 'that is how I got so wet. I felt very queer all day, and I grew worse towards night.'

'You selected an extraordinary evening for your stroll!'

'Yes; but I did not know it was raining—really.'

'Well, I am bound to believe you, but it is a curious story. I should advise you not to play such a prank again. You have had a narrow escape of a dangerous illness.'

Poor Selwyn, to whom any serious sickness was a strange experience, thought his ailments quite bad enough. Three days elapsed before he could leave his bed, and even then he felt weak and giddy, though he

essayed no longer journey than across the drawing-room.

As he sat in an easy-chair by the fire, the whole conversation between Madge and her father seemed to re-echo in his ear. While he lived he thought he should never forget it. Yet what an ass he had been, what a stupid, foolish fellow to rush off in such a paroxysm of vexation, and feel so hurt because he had heard what he was never meant to hear.

Looking at the glowing grate Madge had piled high for him, his heart grew as soft as it had grown hot and angry that night.

What kindness had these people left undone? No son could have been better treated, more tenderly cared for. Three and four times a day Mr. Trosdale came back from the office or elsewhere, to see how it fared with him. The piano was closed. Madge sent away her pupils, and kept the house silent as a cloister. Nothing money could buy or friendship think of was grudged him. No one in the establishment seemed to exist save for his service.

How could he leave them?—and yet it

was right he should do so. How might he ever go out from the warmth and shelter of such a home into the world in which he was so lonely?

Oh! if only he had not heard, or having heard, had he but confronted them boldly and spoken then and there!

After all the goodness they had shown him, was it possible to tell them he must go? And yet how was it possible for him, knowing what he knew, to stay?

Backwards and forwards his thoughts swung with the wearisome monotony of a pendulum. Anyone could see something was harassing him, and yet still he evaded or repelled all the doctor's questions.

'I know very well,' said that gentleman half jocularly, 'that you are in trouble and want an adviser. I can't do much more for you in the way of medicine, but let me prescribe for a "mind ill at ease." Come, what's the scrape? I am not so old but that I can remember when I was young and foolish like yourself. Out with it—confession is good for the soul: is it murder or larceny? robbing a church or eloping with an heiress?'

‘No, I am not in any scrape—indeed.’

‘That’s all nonsense, if you’ll excuse my plain speaking. I know very well there has been more than a cold the matter with you. However, I don’t wish to force your confidence,’ and Dr. Mangin went off slightly in a huff.

Shortly afterwards Miss Trosdale came into the room. She was looking very pretty and very pleasant, and she smiled sympathetically on Selwyn, whose appearance did not do great credit to the amount of attention that had been lavished upon him.

‘This must be sadly dull for you, Mr. Serle,’ she said. ‘I wish we were able to amuse you in some way. Should you like me to play for you, or do you not feel strong enough?’

Selwyn lifted his eyes and looked at her with an expression she did not in the least understand.

‘If you would play for me, if it would not tire you, there is nothing in the world I should enjoy so much.’

She laughed, and saying it was delightful to play for so friendly an auditor, turned to

the piano and began one of Schubert's sonatas.

As usual, after the first minute she forgot she had a listener. She forgot her cares. She soared beyond her narrow life, and passed into a world where music alone had power to carry her; and all the time Selwyn was considering that mighty problem whether to stay or go, and if he went how he should leave. Then suddenly it came upon him what he would do, what he had best do, and having made his decision, he said, as she struck the last chord:

‘Miss Trosdale.’

Thinking he had need of something, she rose instantly and crossed to the fireplace.

‘What can I get for you?’ she asked, finding he did not proceed.

‘Miss Trosdale’—it was harder to go on than he had anticipated, but he meant to finish for all that.

‘Yes?’ she said interrogatively.

‘I have a confession to make’—he was in the middle of the stream now, and he must strike out for the other bank as boldly as he could.

‘A confession!’ repeated Madge, a good deal surprised, and yet not perhaps utterly astonished; ‘is it a very serious one?’

‘To me it seems so.’

‘Then if I were you I should not make it.’

There was such excellent sense in this advice that Selwyn paused, but only for a moment.

‘I am afraid I must,’ he said, ‘for it concerns you as well as myself; the fact is’—hurrying on in hot haste as he saw she was about to interrupt him—‘on Monday evening last I came straight home from the office. I felt ill, and as there was no one in, I sat down here, and I suppose dropped off into a doze, from which I was roused by hearing you and Mr. Trosdale talking about me.’

She flushed to her temples.

‘Stop a moment,’ she said, raising her hand.

He stopped obediently. He thought she was going to speak; but without uttering a word, she seated herself in the nearest chair and remained perfectly silent, while he sat silent also.

They stayed thus for full two minutes,

which seemed to Selwyn as long as any previous two hours in his life ; then she lifted her eyes and said : ‘ Now go on.’

‘ I do not know how to go on,’ he replied ; ‘ I have nothing more to say.’

‘ Then why did you begin to say anything ?’ she asked. ‘ Why could you not have left me in ignorance that you had heard what you were never intended to hear ?’

The floodgates were open at last : it was easy for him to go on now. Speech came to him readily, as it had never done during the whole of his acquaintance with her.

‘ Why,’ he repeated, ‘ do you think it possible I could have stayed here and remained silent ?’

‘ It would have been better,’ she answered.

‘ Then I should have felt ashamed to look you and your father in the face. I should have esteemed myself a traitor not to tell you I had heard “ what I was never intended to hear.” You were very bitter against me, Miss Trosdale—very hard upon me.’

‘ I was,’ she said ; ‘ and I am sorry.’

‘ Why should you be sorry ?’ he asked wonderingly.

‘Because I misjudged you—because I did not know. My father has since told me of the arrangement between you. Why he did not speak of it long ago, I cannot imagine.’

‘I wish he had.’

‘So do I ; it would have saved us all a vast amount of annoyance.’

‘I am vexed to think I should annoy you ; and yet, you see, I was forced to speak, because I felt I could not stop in this house after what I had heard.’

‘You will leave it now,’ she interrupted eagerly ; ‘that is what you were going to tell me ?’

‘If you wish me to do so, I have no choice. But oh ! Miss Trosdale, do not wish it ; do not punish me too hardly for what I really could not help. Without making a scene it was impossible to let you know I was within earshot, and even had I done so——’

‘I understand,’ she remarked, mentally supplying his ellipsis, and there was silence again. ‘This is what has been on your mind,’ she began at last. ‘You owe your illness greatly to——’

‘Eavesdropping,’ he finished.

‘That was not the word I meant to use,’ remarked Madge, smiling in spite of herself.

‘I had heard, and I could not forget—I can never forget,’ murmured the lad, for he was still in heart but a lad, and his weak, broken voice sounded strange through the stillness.

She put one white hand over her face, partly covering it, while she said, not as if speaking to him :

‘No, we never can forget ; that is the worst of it.’

‘I do not know that I should wish to forget,’ he went on inconsequently, ‘for I hope I understand you a little better than I did. I am but a poor sort of fellow, not very bright or clever ; but I should be a poorer and stupider fellow than I am if, through my illness, I had not learned to see things differently. I often used to puzzle myself about you ; now I shall never puzzle myself again.’

He paused, and she did not help him. She sat motionless, thinking—thinking as he had seen her doing fifty times before ; and as he watched, there recurred to his memory

that evening when in a shaft of moonlight she knelt in the old church, alone as she thought, with God.

‘If you send me away—if you say I must go,’ he continued, with a passionate tremor in his quiet tones, ‘I shall go, of course. But you do not know what leaving here will mean to me. I have been so happy in this house. I——’

‘Are you not talking too much?’ she asked.

‘No, for I want to tell you how lonely, how miserable I was, until your father began to be kind to me.’

‘Oh! he was not always kind then?’

‘He never was unkind, Miss Trosdale; but when I came to Liverpool he found that instead of an experienced Assistant, Mr. Dandison had sent a griffin, who knew nothing, and would have to learn the whole of his work.’

‘Did my father teach you?’

Selwyn flushed painfully, for the girl’s eyes were fixed on him as she asked this question. He would have given much to be able to answer ‘Yes,’ but he had still to learn many

things besides *quinto et sexto Victoriæ*—amongst them, the art of lying glibly.

‘He did not, I see,’ she said, which was a remark scarcely likely to lessen Selwyn’s embarrassment.

‘It was not to be expected that he should,’ answered the young man loyally.

‘I quite agree with you there,’ she observed.

‘Why will you misunderstand me, Miss Trosdale? A Surveyor in a town like Liverpool has more important duties to perform than drilling raw recruits, and I was nothing better.’

‘At all events you learnt something?’

‘A person cannot be long in a tax-office without becoming acquainted with the routine, and I tried hard to make myself useful.’

‘And, in fact, made yourself so useful that my father finally took a fancy to you?’

‘Hardly that. I think Mr. Trosdale began to like me from the time he found I knew some little about matters which interest him.’

‘Ah!’

‘And ever since then his kindness has

been greater than I can express. I do not know what I shall do when I have to leave St. Paul's Square.'

'I know,' said Madge. 'You will, believe me, Mr. Serle, the moment you leave here, take your first step back into the road leading to happiness and wealth.'

He looked at her in amazement.

'Happiness and wealth!' he repeated. 'Do you know, Miss Trosdale, you are speaking to a young man on a salary of a hundred pounds a year, who has no living relative, and who has not a soul he loves left on earth.'

'Even so,' she said, 'take my advice and go. We are not fortunate people to be connected with. We shall bring you nothing but disaster. We have not done so remarkably well for ourselves that we are likely to do well for anyone else,' she added bitterly.

'You really wish me then to leave?'

'Have I changed since I first saw you?' she asked. 'Have I not always tried to show you I felt my father was doing you no service by bringing you here? I am glad at

last to have the chance of speaking plainly. If you were my brother, my only brother—the youngest child of my dead mother,' with a ring of tender pathos in her softened voice, 'I could give you no better advice than to go.'

'Why?'

'I have told you—because we can do you no good, and may do you much harm. You have been very straightforward with me, Mr. Serle, and I will endeavour to emulate your frankness. You are young—you have abilities, I suppose, of some sort—you have a career before you—the years contain all sorts of possibilities for a man so absolutely untrammelled. Why should you spoil all your future chances by electing to cast in your lot with people who live in St. Paul's Square—with myself, a teacher of music—with my father, as confirmed a gambler as ever wrecked his own life and that of everyone belonging to him?'

She rose as she ended her sentence, and flinging a piece of paper she had been nervously twisting into the fire, stood before Selwyn a very embodiment of the spirit of denunciation.

The repression it was her wont habitually to exercise made her passion, when it found vent, all the stronger. Now Selwyn saw one side of her real nature, knew what had attracted him to her, felt that the more she strove to push him away the closer she was drawing him to her.

‘A gambler!’ he echoed. ‘Surely you are mistaken—Mr. Trosdale is no gambler.’

She laughed outright.

‘Certainly you are what you said, a very griffin. Do you think there are no gamblers save those who spend their nights over the card-table? What are betting men? what are speculators? what are *inventors*?’

‘Men deserving the most profound admiration those who are unable to understand their trials can offer,’ said Selwyn reverently. ‘But for them the world would——’

‘Pray do not go over it all again,’ she interposed. ‘I have had their praise sounded till I am weary.’

‘But, Miss Trosdale—forgive me if I worry you—when a man devotes his means, his life, his talents, to perfecting one idea——’

‘*One*—go on, I am with you so far.’

Selwyn stopped as if shot. In the face of facts he could not pursue his argument, so he shifted his ground.

‘Do you think you quite understand your father?’ he asked diffidently.

‘I fancy it is more important to know whether you do,’ she answered. ‘Mr. Serle, we have got to-day on very unpleasant subjects, and I know you consider me wrong and unfeeling. Yes, yes!’ she added, as Selwyn exclaimed ‘No, no!’ ‘Therefore I want to try to make you understand that you are not to imagine, because I talk in this way—because I cannot sympathize with my father—that I do not love him. If I did not, whom should I love? I have no one else—no other in all the world. I was not fourteen when he was left to me a solemn charge by the nearest and dearest friend I ever had, or ever shall have. Could I only see him happy and successful, I should care little what happened to me. It is because I cannot believe any of these inventions will ever bring him aught but trouble that I am so bitterly set against them—so anxious no

other person should be bitten with the same mania.'

She stopped, but Selwyn did not speak. It was his turn now to keep silence.

'I am not on the whole sorry you did overhear my outburst the other night, and that you decided to speak about it,' she at last continued with an uneasy laugh, 'because I have now the opportunity of saying what it is best should be said without disguise. For five-and-twenty years, at all events, my poor father has been pursuing a shadow. He has sacrificed time, money, position, to what I cannot but consider a chimera. For years we have been going steadily downhill—getting poorer and poorer, dropping lower and lower in the social scale. My father's grandfather was an admiral, who moved in the very highest circles; my mother's grandfather was Lord-Lieutenant of his county. I am a paid organist, a teacher of music—glad to take pupils at half-a-crown an hour.'

Again she paused, and again Selwyn did not speak; he was thinking—thinking as he had seen her do, so often.

‘I have only one thing more to say,’ she continued, after a minute’s pause, ‘and that is in my own excuse——’

‘Not to me,’ interrupted Selwyn; ‘please never to me.’

A look of swift surprised pleasure crossed her face even as she said :

‘To you, certainly, of all people. Any other night in the year, perhaps, had you heard me speak to my father about you and money matters, it would have been in different terms; but——’

‘Miss Trosdale, if you only knew how this pains me, I believe you would not go on.’

‘I believe,’ she answered calmly, ‘that when you lay your head on your pillow to-night, you will feel all the happier for having heard me say I was wrong. My temper got the better of me, Mr. Serle. I have not a good temper, but, as a rule, I keep it well in hand. I had that day, however, been harassed simply to death by a thousand petty trifles, and—and you know the result. I have since told my father how grieved I felt for my rudeness to him, and a

great reign of peace has since ensued. He met me more than half-way ; this, I think, is all,' and with a deprecating gesture she would have passed out of the room, had Selwyn not caught her dress.

'One moment,' he cried. 'Miss Trosdale, how can I thank you enough for your frankness ?'

She looked down on him with a beautiful light in her wonderful brown eyes, the while she answered :

'I only followed your example.'

'Before you go, may I ask you one question—only one ?'

'You may ask me ten thousand, but——'

'You reserve to yourself the right of answering ; however I will put my question, at any rate. Is it solely because you think I may become bitten with a mania for invention that you wish me to leave ?'

'Broadly speaking, yes.'

'And if I assure you I have neither the talent nor wish to invent——'

'You may not now—but what about hereafter ?'

'I believe I can answer for myself. I do

not come of an imaginative or speculative stock. So far as I know, we have always been perfectly plain, matter-of-fact sort of people, content with our lives and our position, and quite satisfied with the reward God saw fit to give for our work.'

'And yet I think I have heard my father say a certain young gentleman, owning a similar name to Mr. Selwyn Serle, did not feel quite contented in her Majesty's service, or with her Majesty's pay.'

Selwyn sat straight up in his chair—no doubt as to his answering that question.

'Miss Trosdale,' he said, 'if some night you came home "harassed simply to death," to quote your own expression just now, and declared you wished you had no pupils, and desired never to hear another note of music, do not you think it would be rather hard if your statement were taken seriously?'

'I do ; and——'

'And there have been times, I confess, when taxes and taxpayers seemed too much for me—when I hated the Inland Revenue Office, and felt that I should like to leave it for ever ; but I knew all through my little fits of dis-

content I should be insane to quarrel with my bread and butter, and I am not going to quarrel with it. I shall try to serve her Majesty faithfully, and take her pay for honest work done so long as I live, probably.'

'But my father says he will make your fortune as well as his own, and that he hopes you will not remain a Civil Servant very long.'

'I hope you will not think me ungrateful when I say I should prefer a small fortune made by myself to a large one made for me. The thing I want most to see is your father a rich man. For myself, I am quite content to plod on in safety, as I am doing now.'

'I can't tell you—I can *not* tell you how thankful I feel to hear you talk so sensibly.'

'You might have heard me talk sensibly long ago, Miss Trosdale, if you had only given me the chance. You need not fear my going off at a tangent. I have no high notions; I have no great ambition; I do not mean to get into debt, or to bring discredit on my name if I can help it.'

'You are a very sensible young man.'

‘And now that you understand me, may I remain here——’

‘You must decide.’

‘No. If you dislike me—if I am a trouble to you—I will not stop an hour.’

‘You are not a trouble to me now, and I do not dislike you ; on the contrary——’

‘Then let me stay. You said a while ago if I were your brother, the youngest child of your dead mother, you could give me no better advice than to go. I think a man must take charge of his own life, and I am sure it is well for me to stay. Miss Trosdale, you have no brother, nor have I a sister : let me try to be a brother to you—I do not think you will find me disloyal.’

‘I am sure you will not be that——’

‘Then the outcome of all this misery—for I have been miserable—is happiness. You know me better now, and I may stay.’

‘It is for you to settle. If you truly believe remaining in this poor place will add to your happiness, let it be as you say ; now you must have some beef-tea ;’ and disengaging her dress, which he had held all the time, she left him.



CHAPTER V.

AN EVENING PARTY.

THREE days later Selwyn was running up the stone steps leading to the tax-offices, when, hearing himself hailed from below, he paused, and saw Mr. Kerry toiling after him.

‘Anybody might think you were in the height of good spirits,’ remarked the Irishman reproachfully.

‘So I am,’ answered Selwyn.

‘It’s well to be you ; and where have you been all this time ?’

‘Mostly where I told you I was going—in bed.’

‘Get out with you !’

‘Fact—upon my honour ! I have been ill——’

‘A likely story, and you going up these stairs on the wings of the wind. Where have you been? Trosdale told me you were taking a few days’ holiday. “And the Lord knows,” I said, “he has need of one!”’

Selwyn could scarce help laughing outright at this stroke of diplomacy on the part of his chief, but he answered with grave composure :

‘I have been taking holiday, but only as I tell you.’

‘And you were ill, and not merry-making?’

‘Ill—not merry-making.’

‘And the old hyena never let on a word that you were bad, only made me believe—back luck to him!—that you were gone off somewhere on the spree.’

‘Anyhow, Mr. Kerry, I am back again now, ever so much better than I have felt for months past, and very glad to see you again.’

‘You’ll find a fine crop of work waiting for you.’

‘I must mow it down, then, as fast as I can.’

‘For a sick man you’re in wonderful spirits.’

‘I am all right again now.’

‘So it seems. I don’t know what has come to the lot of you, I’m sure. There’s Trosdale as pleasant as if somebody had left him a fortune; you just out of the doctor’s hands are light as a feather; and as for Cramsey, there’s no end to his politeness. He calls me “mister,” and tacks “if you please” to every sentence. I hope such changed ways don’t mean death and destruction.’

‘I hope not either, and the spring coming on.’

‘It’s nice spring weather—rain, rain, rain, slush up to your knees, and a wind fit to cut your head off. However, if you are pleased I may be. I must get on to my work, though. Perhaps you won’t be grinning all over your face, as you are doing now, when you see your lot. The devil a thing Trosdale or Holt or Thistlethwaite has done this week and more. Trosdale must be mad, and I told him so.’

‘He was pleased, of course?’

‘Faith, it’s little I care whether he is pleased or displeased! A man should not take his pay if he means to do nothing for it.

If it was the Lord-Lieutenant I'd say the same.'

'Well, I'll go and try to do my work,' answered Selwyn, who did not much relish the turn conversation was taking; and he hurried on to Third Liverpool, followed by the remark from Mr. Kerry:

'I wish you joy of it.'

All day long Selwyn steadily ploughed his way through the mass of arrears, which did not seem to have been touched by anyone during his absence. Mr. Trosdale came in twice, but merely to write some private letters; while after luncheon the clerks both made themselves conspicuous by their absence.

'There will have to be some change made here, and that before long,' considered the Assistant. 'I will speak to Mr. Trosdale to-night.'

'My good fellow,' said his chief, when he broached the matter to him, 'I know all you can say against Holt: he is a lazy, drunken vagabond. Thistlethwaite also is a lazy, drunken vagabond, and they are both unscrupulous liars; but when either likes to work he can get through as much in an hour as any other

clerk in the offices in a day ; and occupied as I am just at present, I could not think of bringing a stranger into the place. When I have got my matter well in train I will devote my attention to finding capable men.'

'But really, Mr. Trosdale——'

'Yes, I am aware ; everything is in a frightful condition. No one can feel the position more keenly than I ; in fact, if I did not thrust the state of affairs at the office from me I should be actually unfit to attend to my own business. But I shall soon be more at leisure, and then I give you my word Third Liverpool shall be thoroughly re-organized. Do your best for me, Serle ; the strain cannot continue much longer.'

Very heartily Selwyn promised he would do his best, and very honestly did he fulfil that promise. He went to the office early in the morning, so as to get a couple of hours' hard work over before any member of the clamorous public could put in an appearance. He set his shoulder so resolutely to the wheel, that somewhat to his amazement he found it actually move without outside help from anyone.

‘Don’t overdo it, my boy,’ entreated Mr. Kerry, ‘though it gladdens me to see you laying your soul into your work. Except myself there’s not another in this building beside you has a bit of consideration for Victoria. It is cruel, it is, to watch the way she is treated by her servants ; but mind what I say, though : don’t overdo it, or you’ll break down again.’

Had Mr. Kerry only known it, there was not much fear of such a catastrophe. The finest tonic on which a man can begin his day’s work is happiness, and Selwyn now felt inexpressibly happy. He had not been slow in availing himself of his new privileges. Madge at once became his constant care. To ease her, to serve her, to think for her, to save her trouble, proved the delight of his life. He never now allowed her to return home alone at night ; wherever she might be he managed to accompany her back to St. Paul’s Square. He was her very double, faithful as a dog, and as little wearisome, always thinking what he could do for her, seeking no reward save the consciousness that he was lightening her burden by a little.

His devotion and unselfishness must have touched almost any woman, and it affected Madge deeply. It was the pleasantest intercourse too ; by almost imperceptible degrees they dropped into the closest friendship.

As they walked together he told her all about his past life, while she, without knowing what she was doing, fell into the habit of mentioning any incident connected with her daily experience which interested or amused her.

Ere long Selwyn learned to know the peculiarities of all 'my employers,' as Madge laughingly called her lady patrons. Odd, many of them were; trying, a few; but not one seemed to be unkind.

'No,' said Madge, summing up, 'I can truthfully say every woman whose child I have taught has in her own fashion been good to me. None of the trials novelists are so fond of describing have fallen to my lot. As a rule I have been treated far more like a daughter than as a teacher.'

It was a strange life for the pair to lead, yet one most innocent. Through their own beautiful Bohemia they wandered with as

little thought or fear of Mrs. Grundy as children. It was a free and fair land across which their way led them at that time ; and over and over again Selwyn blessed the chance which broke down the barriers that had kept Miss Trosdale and himself well-nigh strangers.

Though they had to do without so many things young persons in their rank of life regard as mere necessities, Madge and Selwyn were, during that time of unconstrained intercourse, incredibly happy. He went with her when she paid an evening visit to Cleveland Square on a quest for bargains ; they were wont to treat themselves to St. George's Hall on Saturday evenings, when they could hear good music for sixpence ; he executed little errands for her as he went to and from the office. She looked for his home-coming, and abandoned herself to the pleasure of having so faithful a friend with an intensity which was part of her nature.

‘ It cannot last, I know,’ she told him one day ; ‘ but it will be always pleasant to look back upon.’

‘ Why cannot it last?’ asked Selwyn.

‘Because nothing which is agreeable ever does last,’ she answered sententiously; ‘and that reminds me Mrs. Gibbs is going to send you an invitation to a dance—her first dance of the season.’

‘How have I come to such honour?’ asked Selwyn.

‘She wants young men—she always is short of young men—and she asked me if I thought “our lodger” would care to join them.’

‘And you said——?’

‘I said I thought he would very much. Her parties are not exactly what the Americans call high-toned, but there is a good deal of amusement to be got out of them for all that. I must go, of course, in the way of business, and you must go too. Mrs. Gibbs will treat you as a person of great distinction.’

‘I will certainly go with great pleasure——’

‘You dance, I hope?’

‘Yes, I dance.’

‘That is right. I shall put on my grandest bib-and-tucker, and trust you will make your-

self look most distinguished. Mrs. Gibbs says she makes it a rule never to know any but the best people.'

Next morning Selwyn duly received Mrs. Gibbs' card, and also a note from that lady, in which almost every second word was italicized, begging him not merely to favour her with his company, but to bring any *very nice* young gentleman of his acquaintance with him.

'I don't know any nice young gentleman,' said Selwyn.

'You must try and find one,' answered Madge. 'Do. Is there not some lad in the Inland Revenue Office who would enjoy a dance? I think there must be.'

'I cannot think of any likely person at the moment. I suppose she would not care for Mr. Cramsey? I dare say he could wash out a waistcoat for the occasion.'

'She would care for anybody new,' was the reply. 'Perhaps in the course of a few days inspiration may come to you.'

Many a true word is spoken in jest—in-
spiration did come to Selwyn that very morning from a most unexpected source

while he stood looking out of his office window, both arms supported on the ledge.

The open space beneath was full of pigeons that came flocking down from the dome in countless numbers, as if they were expecting to find corn growing among the stones, victims probably of some practical joker amongst their ranks ; and Selwyn remained watching them till he fell into a brown study, from which he was roused by a thump on the back and a familiar voice exclaiming :

‘ I’ll give you a penny for your thoughts, though I doubt if they are worth half the money.’

The intruder was Mr. Kerry, of course, who had stolen on tiptoe across the room in order to give his young friend a fright, which he did so effectually that Selwyn, startled out of his wits, answered at once :

‘ I was thinking if there were anyone I could ask to go to a dance with me.’

The words were no sooner spoken than he would have recalled them if he could, but they had fallen upon attentive ears.

‘ If you’re looking for a dancer, young man,’ said Mr. Kerry, drawing himself up

and smiling a smile which was proud in its humility, 'you may be content, because you've found one.'

Selwyn looked dubiously at the speaker.

'I did not know you danced,' he said.

'Dance, is it?' exclaimed Mr. Kerry in a sort of expostulatory howl; 'there isn't a better dancer in Ireland. Why, when old Phil Macroon, rest his sowl, took his fiddle down from the shelf where the hens roosted, and scraped out "The wind that blows the barley," the pig himself began to caper, and we used to dance till Phil got so drunk he couldn't see out of his eyes, and tried to rub them with the fiddle-bow.'

'You know all that's no good unless you can valse,' said Selwyn desperately.

'Waltz!' cried Mr. Kerry, 'and why not? If Daniel Kerry can't waltz better than the Liverpool men, may the devil throw fat in my eyes, and that's a good Irish oath. There isn't a waltz of the whole lot of 'em I couldn't dance like a Patagonian before you had got shut of the feeding-bottle, let me tell you. Dew tem, tro tem, glide, lurch, and Boston rockaway, there isn't a secret in Terpsichore's

bosom but Dan Kerry has scratched it out. I tell ye, I'm your man; ye'll find it hard to match me.'

Evidently Mr. Kerry was so determined to accept the invitation which had not yet been offered to him, that Selwyn was sorely perplexed. Mr. Kerry was not by any means the companion he could have desired. He had no confidence in the powers to which his friend so boldly laid claim. Nor did he feel hopeful that Mr. Kerry's conception of the garments suitable for an evening party would correspond with his own. On the other hand, Madge had implied that the guests would not be hypercritical on this or any other point, and he felt that this might be an opportunity of acknowledging some of the real kindnesses which he had received. Mr. Kerry did not leave him long in doubt as to his intentions.

'It's mighty fortunate that I haven't anything on hand just at present,' he remarked, 'or else I mightn't have been able to oblige you. Where did you say the good people live who're giving the dance, and when is it to come off?'

Seeing that there was no escape, Selwyn gave him the address ; and, with the view of looking after him closely from the first, proposed that when the evening arrived they should go together. But this arrangement Mr. Kerry, for some reason best known to himself, declined.

The days passed swiftly, and at length the momentous hour struck, and found the residence of Mrs. Gibbs brightly illuminated. Gas burned in all the rooms, and an arrangement of three Chinese lanterns rendered the passage of the staircase dangerous to any person of more than middle height. Several turnip lanterns, stuck upon the area spikes, served the double purpose of marking the house and of collecting a crowd of street boys, who made disparaging remarks upon the guests as they arrived. Within, everything was arranged upon the correctest principles. The folding-doors between the drawing and dining rooms were taken off their hinges, and the floors of both rooms anointed so liberally with beeswax that the foot adhered firmly thereto, and at every step required some effort to extricate it. Con-

siderable pains had been bestowed upon the arrangement of the flowers, pots of which were placed, not in corners, but wherever the passage was narrowest and it appeared probable that the dancers would require most space. The word 'Welcome' was hospitably exhibited upon the walls, beautifully executed in rice, grains of which were continually falling off; and, sticking to the beeswaxed floor, rendered motion of any kind perilous. However, everyone said the general effect was most tasteful, and the guests were loud in their praises, very loud indeed.

At the door of the drawing-room stood Mrs. Gibbs, a short, stout, red-faced lady, with black hair and a perpetual smile. She was clad in a sky-blue silk dress, which fitted her so tightly that it was difficult to understand how she had managed to get into it. She found breath enough, however, to welcome Selwyn very hospitably, to inform him that no introductions were required, and that his friend had already arrived.

In an agony of trepidation Selwyn looked round to ascertain what Mr. Kerry was doing, and espied him seated on an ottoman

beside two young ladies, who giggled so frequently, and so constantly covered their faces with their handkerchiefs, that it was clear Mr. Kerry had found some subject of conversation greatly to their taste. When he saw Selwyn, Mr. Kerry hastened to meet and present him to 'Miss Julia and Miss Clara Pershaw.'

'Miss Julia Pershaw sings like a seraph, she does,' commented Mr. Kerry on completing his introduction, 'and Miss Clara's going to play for her. We've been talking about you.'

'Indeed?' said Selwyn; 'I hope, Miss Pershaw, that my friend was speaking kindly of me.'

'Oh yes, indeed he was,' said both ladies at once.

'You'll not tell him what I was saying now,' interposed Mr. Kerry in a blandishing manner.

'I don't know,' simpered Miss Julia; 'I think I shall.'

We all know, however, that the best laid plans of mice and men 'gang aft agley;' and accordingly, whilst Mr. Kerry was speaking,

Selwyn had discerned Madge entering the room, so that when Miss Julia Pershaw glanced round to reveal to him the slanders which Mr. Kerry had been circulating, she found his place vacant. She did not attempt to conceal her vexation.

‘Well, I’m sure!’ she said, biting her lip.

Her sister smiled, and Mr. Kerry observed :

‘Ah! a man doesn’t want to hear himself laughed at. Did you think he was going to stay while you told him what I said? You should have listened to me.’

And with an air of conscious superiority Mr. Kerry took the fan from Miss Pershaw’s hand and fanned himself with it.

‘Selwyn’s mighty rich,’ he observed, after a short interval.

‘Is he? Then why does he live with the Trosdales?’ asked Miss Julia, whose heart was beginning to swell with feelings the reverse of charitable.

‘That’s a secret,’ observed Mr. Kerry mystically. Then he added casually : ‘It’s himself has the taste for beauty.’

‘If you mean,’ said Miss Julia, who was

gradually being strung up to a high pitch of venom, 'that he shows it by talking to that odious Miss Trosdale, I can't say I agree with you. She's no more figure than a scarecrow.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Kerry, in his most impassive manner, and fanning himself meditatively, 'there's some as thinks different.'

'If you're one of them, you'd better give me my fan, and go and talk to her yourself,' said Miss Julia very sharply.

'Sure, that's a very good suggestion,' said Mr. Kerry, but he did not move for all that, till he saw fit to do so.

Meantime Selwyn had been pressing Madge to dance.

'You can't possibly play all the evening,' he said. 'You must have some help. I will ask Mrs. Gibbs.'

'Indeed, you will do no such thing,' she answered. 'Imagine Mrs. Gibbs' astonishment, if I told her I was not going to play! No, you can't help me with that music; you had much better leave it alone, thank you! That was Mr. Kerry, wasn't it, whom I saw you talking to?'

‘Yes. How did you know that? Oh, I remember now. He told me he had called on your father.’

‘Yes,’ said Madge; ‘it was rather unfortunate. Here he comes; he means to claim acquaintance.’

‘Shall I stop him?’ asked Selwyn quickly.

‘No, no,’ she replied; ‘let him come. I don’t mind.’

Having left Miss Julia Pershaw in a vexed and nervous condition, which made her long to slap somebody, Mr. Kerry, feeling greatly pleased at the piece of mischief which he had achieved, advanced jauntily and approached Miss Trosdale with his most affable smile.

‘Kerry,’ said Selwyn, seeing that the thing was inevitable, ‘I believe you know Miss Trosdale?’

Mr. Kerry shook hands gravely, and inquired for the Surveyor with as great an appearance of interest as if he had not seen him that afternoon, assuring Madge that he had a great regard for her father.

‘I dare say you have seen him since I have,’ she answered; ‘but he went away

very well this morning. I am glad to find there is so much mutual regard in the Tax-Offices.'

'Deed and there is,' said Mr. Kerry; 'and your father knows me very well. It's a good turn he did me, a year ago.'

'He never told me of that,' said Madge. 'Pray what was it?'

'Sure, I was vaccinated!' said Mr. Kerry, in a dolorous whining voice. 'And——'

But at that moment Mrs. Gibbs came up, looking more than ever as if she were choking.

'So sorry to interrupt you,' she gasped, 'but they're all ready, Miss Trosdale, and if you *could* play a waltz.'

Madge sat down, while Mr. Kerry, seeing that there was no chance of completing his story just then, whispered to Madge behind his hand, 'I'll tell you after a bit, when we're quiet;' and went away to secure the hand of Miss Clara Pershaw for the dance.

There was not much fault to be found with Mr. Kerry's dancing. Any person who was hypercritical might have said that he threw his legs about too much, rather as if he were

afraid of 'kicking the pig' at every turn. But nobody criticized such slight peculiarities at Mrs. Gibbs' party, and the Irishman passed muster very well.

Selwyn breathed more freely when he saw his friend's performance, and felt at liberty to go his own way without anxiety. He danced with Miss Julia Pershaw, whose conversation turned principally upon the Licensed Victuallers' Ball, which had taken place two or three evenings before, and of which he was led to believe Miss Pershaw had been the acknowledged beauty and principal attraction.

The dance was no sooner over than Mr. Kerry ungallantly darted away from his partner, and coming towards Madge, who had turned half round upon the music-stool, he said tenderly :

'I was going to tell you about the divil who vaccinated me.'

Again it was Mrs. Gibbs who frustrated the confidence.

'Oh, Miss Trosdale!' she said, 'do, like a good soul, go and see what is the matter with Archie. Don't you hear him crying?'

Poor lamb! he wants to come downstairs. But you'd better not bring him.'

And then, as Madge departed on her errand of consolation, Mrs. Gibbs turned to Mr. Kerry and observed :

'Children are a great trial, Mr. Kerry.'

'They are that,' he replied; 'but when they've got a good mother, they're as happy as the sky is high.'

Mrs. Gibbs smiled complacently.

'I think my children are happy,' she said, and waddled off well pleased to discourse to others of her guests.

During Madge's absence, Miss Julia Pershaw sang a plaintive song about the ocean, which was said to moan with peculiar mournfulness whenever a true lover died of a broken heart. It met with much applause, and was hardly finished when Madge returned, and dancing being resumed, was continued without any further interruption until the announcement of supper. By a stratagem which made Selwyn long to kick him, Mr. Kerry managed to take Madge in to supper, and thereby found at last an opportunity of pouring out his story of her father's goodness.

‘I give ye my word I swelled up like an orange,’ he said; ‘there wasn’t a bit of me that wasn’t sore. Sure, it’s very remarkable that an old wizard of a doctor can do all that just by scratching you.’

Here he stopped, and looked steadily at Madge, who answered politely :

‘It is very remarkable, Mr. Kerry; how much you must have suffered!’

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Kerry; and there was a world of meaning in his tone. ‘It is remarkable—that’s true. It was affliction, it was: real affliction. I give ye my word, when I came to the office the next day, I hadn’t got the heart of a calf. Selwyn, there, might have cheated me, or any other greenhorn. By the eternal powers, but I was low! And I sat all morning looking out of window into the street, and thinking of the cabins and the pigs and the hens, that I maybe wasn’t going to see any more.’

Mr. Kerry’s voice broke here, and he looked very sad.

‘Dear me!’ remarked Madge, not daring to look him in the face. ‘Don’t you think you must have fancied you were more ill than

you really were? Vaccination is not usually considered to be so dangerous.'

'There's some as thinks it is,' said Mr. Kerry impressively. 'But this is what I wanted to tell you. Just as I was at my worst, in comes Trosdale—that's your father,' he explained, looking hard at Madge.

She nodded, and the narrator continued:

'And he said, "Hullo, what's the matter? You look all anyhow to-day." So I told him, and he said, "Look here, why don't you rub your side with goose-grease?"'

Here Madge burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. Mr. Kerry, who in the course of his pleasing anecdote had gradually tilted himself more and more towards Madge's chair, sat instantly bolt upright, and looked at his neighbour with a stare of such severity, not to say displeasure, that she steadied herself by a strong effort, and with grave sweetness asked him to take her back to the dancing-room, which service he at once rendered with studied ceremony. A few people were already re-assembled, and without preamble Madge began to play a waltz, the sound of which soon drew more guests

from the supper-table, and dancing again became general.

For perhaps an hour Madge played on steadily, making the intervals as short as possible. Mr. Kerry, to her relief, did not come near her, but divided his attentions between the two Miss Pershaws and several of their friends. By the time midnight arrived the decorum with which the evening had opened was considerably relaxed. Mrs. Gibbs' British wines — raisin, ginger, and elderberry, to say nothing of a very superior and sugary champagne—had warmed and softened hearts on every side. Hands were tightly squeezed, asides spoken—not always in a whisper—and the furious progress of some of the couples in the wild mazes of the dance threatened danger to life and limb. Madge began to be conscious that a great deal of noise was going on behind her, and at the termination of a polka turned to ascertain its cause. The first sight which she beheld was Mr. Kerry, reclining on an ottoman which held just three people. On his right and left hand sat a Miss Pershaw, and, in order that his behaviour

might be quite impartial and thus escape exciting jealousy or remark, he had openly placed an arm round the waist of each young lady. His face shone with unusual animation, and the drooping eyelids of the two Miss Pershaws, as he addressed alternate compliments to them, showed that a kind of triangular flirtation was in progress.

If none of the other guests had gone quite so far as Mr. Kerry, there was yet considerable license in their behaviour, and several flirtations of the most barefaced character were going on. Selwyn was the only unoccupied man in the room. He was standing in the doorway, looking horribly bored, when Madge ceased playing, and came over at once to her side.

‘Can’t we get away?’ he asked peevishly. ‘I’m tired to death of this.’

‘I thought you were quite happy,’ said Madge demurely. ‘Look at Mr. Kerry—do look at him!’

‘I see him,’ said Selwyn grimly. ‘I’m not likely to forget him.’

‘Shall I tell you what he told me at supper? No, I don’t think I will—at least, not now. I

shall keep that until we are all in very low spirits.'

Before Selwyn could answer, Mrs. Gibbs, who had been talking to Mr. Kerry, ambled across the room.

'Do you think, Miss Trosdale,' she asked, with her sweetest smile, 'that you could play the accompaniment to "Tell me, my heart"?''

'I'm afraid not, unless I had the music,' answered Madge. 'I don't remember ever seeing it.'

'It doesn't matter one penny bit, Mrs. Gibbs,' Mr. Kerry called, without changing his amorous position. 'I'll sing it without any music at all!'

And, suiting the action to the word, he threw his head back, and opening his mouth wide, began in slow and mournful tones, embellished with a rich brogue: 'Tell me, my "hort," why morning's proime looks like the fading eve, looks like the fading eve, the fading eve?' Words cannot describe the lachrymose manner in which Mr. Kerry pounded this absurd conundrum. His voice sank almost to a whisper at the last 'fading

eve,' but it revived on the 'gruppetto' which began the next bar, and which he executed with a kind of howl that astounded his listeners. 'Why,' Mr. Kerry went on, still in search of information, 'why the gay lark's cele-he-he-he-stial chi-i-i-i-me shall tell, shall tell the soul to grieve' (here darkness settled down on Mr. Kerry's soul, and misery folded her wings over him), 'the soul to grieve, to grieve, to grieve?' Sadder and more funereal came the tones of the singer's voice, more and more mournful grew his face, and the corners of the two Miss Pershaw's mouths dropped in sympathy. 'The heaving bosom' (went on Mr. Kerry, rocking himself dolefully to and fro) 'seems to say, Ah, hapless maid' (here he glanced expressively round at Miss Julia Pershaw), 'your love's away, your love's away, your love's—your love's away!' Mr. Kerry insisted on this depressing statement as fiercely as if some one had contradicted him; but finding no opponent arise, he became at once jocular and tender. His face was wreathed with smiles as he again addressed a ridiculous and unanswerable question to his heart, this

time inquiring 'why summer's glow a wintry day beguiles?' and further, 'why fading nature smiles?' If fading nature smiled, however, her good spirits were as a thing of nought in comparison with Mr. Kerry's. Never was such a display of singing heard, such roulades, such grace-notes, turns and trills executed with the utmost courage, and with a length of wind which seemed unfailing. 'Your love is near!' shouted Mr. Kerry in Miss Pershaw's ear, and that young lady started back appalled. 'Ah, happy maid, happy maid!' he screamed at the top of his voice, whilst Madge whispered to Selwyn, 'He will certainly break a bloodvessel.' Fortunately, however, Mr. Kerry was near the end of his song, and with a last wild whoop, which might have been heard half across the county, he ceased, and sat looking round at the guests with a smile of conscious self-approval.

Loud was the applause and many the congratulations showered upon him; unanimous also were the requests for another song; for Mrs. Gibbs' guests generally appreciated a powerful voice in singing. Miss Julia Pershaw,

however, who had held her taper fingers to her ear during the latter part of the song, rose, and, disengaging herself from Mr. Kerry's circling arm, remarked :

‘ I think, if you are going to sing any more, I'll be better on the other side of the room, or I shall have no head left.’

The suggestion that he should oblige the company with another song was quite to Mr. Kerry's mind.

‘ Don't go!’ entreated Mr. Kerry, who was greatly gratified by the request that he should again oblige the company. ‘ I'll give you something better still this time. “ Lo, here the gentle lark, weary of rest,”’ he went on, ‘ “ from his moist cabinet——”’

‘ His what ?’ asked Miss Pershaw.

‘ His moist cabinet,’ replied Mr. Kerry. ‘ Sure, that's his nest, and he wanted to get out of it because it was wet with the rain.’

‘ But why is it called a cabinet ?’ persisted Miss Pershaw.

‘ It's evident you don't read poetry, or you wouldn't ask,’ Mr. Kerry replied, with great presence of mind. ‘ But we'll never get the song sung if you keep on asking questions.’

Unfortunately, at that moment there was a movement among some of Mrs. Gibbs' guests, who began to take leave. Miss Pershaw whispered to her sister that their maid had come for them, to whose care Mr. Kerry relinquished her with more alacrity than might have been expected. Indeed, he remarked subsequently that 'she was a heavy girl, that green-eyed Pershaw.' While Selwyn was finding Madge's cloak, Mr. Kerry retreated into the supper-room in company with Mr. Gibbs, just to have 'a toothful' out of a bottle vouched for by the minister, a worthy old gentleman, whose appreciation of this particular beverage was so keen that he declared it was 'fit to be preached about.'

'And a good deal better worth it than a lot of the things you parsons tell us,' said Mr. Kerry *sotto voce*, as he hurried out to rejoin Madge and Selwyn. Alas! however, for the fickleness of friendship! Though he had enjoined the young people to wait for him, they were gone. Mr. Kerry's toothful had taken too long to swallow.

‘When was it they started?’ he asked, finding the birds flown.

‘They can scarcely have turned the corner, sir,’ the parlourmaid answered.

Whereupon Mr. Kerry, without pausing to say another word to anyone, seized his hat and rushed into the street.





CHAPTER VI.

MR. TROSDALE'S NEWS.

RLATED with having given Mr. Kerry the slip, Selwyn hurried Madge along the pavements at aching speed.

He knew they were not safe from pursuit ; but by taking short cuts, known, as he fondly believed, only to himself, he trusted they might reach home before the enamoured Irishman overtook them. There could be no mistake about the sentiments Mr. Cramsey's Assistant entertained towards Miss Trosdale. Selwyn was not blind, and a child might have seen Mr. Kerry's feelings were of the tenderest description. Madge, too, had not repelled his advances. On the contrary, she seemed rather to encourage

them, merely for her own amusement possibly ; but Mr. Serle did not approve of such amusement. In his fraternal capacity he felt it his duty to discourage all flirting and flightiness on the part of his sister, and he was heartily congratulating himself on the success of his strategy, when faint cries were heard in the distance—cries coming nearer and nearer—cries such as those wherewith a shipwrecked sailor might despairingly endeavour to arrest the attention of a receding ship.

‘Don’t look round,’ entreated Selwyn, who well knew what these sounds portended.

‘I must. I could not possibly be so rude,’ answered Madge, which was very irritating to the young man, who knew very well she could be more rude if she chose.

But she did not choose. Instead, she stopped dead, and waited in the bright moonlight till Mr. Kerry should come up with them.

‘What do you mean, Serle, by taking a young lady through the streets at a hand-gallop?’ he exclaimed. ‘Why did you not wait for me as I bid you? Indeed, Miss Trosdale, he has no more manners than

a calf, and I'm ashamed of him. Take my arm—do! You must be tired after playing so long. Lean the whole of your weight on me. Don't be afraid; I could stand more than that.'

'Thank you, Mr. Kerry; but I must hold up my dress.'

'And a lovely dress it is, too. There was not its like in the room.'

'You are very kind to say so.'

'It's very kind of *you* to say so. Well, and what did you think of the party?'

'I am more anxious to know what you thought of it. Mrs. Gibbs' parties are not quite new to me.'

'Faith, it was mighty pleasant. Mrs. Gibbs is a little keg of a creature, so tightly hooped she can't get about very easily; but she did her best. I consider she tried very hard to make the thing go off well, and so did Gibbs. So did everybody, without it was Serle there.'

'Certainly, I should never have ventured to make myself agreeable in the way you did,' retorted Selwyn.

'Is it with the Pershaws you mean?' asked

Mr. Kerry. 'Sure, they expected it. Girls like them don't think anything of a man who isn't pretty easy with them.'

'But you were so very easy,' suggested Madge.

'Ah! they're not worth talking about,' answered their recreant admirer.

'I felt greatly disappointed at not hearing you sing "Lo, the lark." You emerged with great triumph from your controversy about the cabinet with Miss Pershaw.'

'She's a foolish sort of being,' returned Mr. Kerry. 'If she'd had a grain of sense, she might have known it was a kind of turn-up bedstead the poet meant.'

Madge's laugh rang out clear through the night.

'See there, now,' lamented her admirer, 'you're always making game of me.'

'Because you are so funny,' said the girl.

'I did not know you were such a singsmith, Kerry,' interposed Selwyn, who thought it high time to stop this bandying of airy nothings.

'It's not much you know about me, for all your learning,' answered Mr. Kerry in a tone of injured greatness.

‘I cannot tell you the delightful surprise your singing was to me,’ observed Madge ; ‘you must have practised a great deal.’

‘You may say that ! I was head man from the time I was a child in our chapel choir.’

‘But they did not let you sing “Tell me, my Heart,” surely, in chapel ?’

‘You are at it again,’ said Mr. Kerry.

‘At what ?’ asked Madge.

‘Making fun of me ; but I don’t mind—upon my conscience, it only pleases me. If laughing at Daniel Kerry gives you any pleasure, laugh away. I’d lie down for you to tramp over me, rather than you should wet the sole of your foot. Serle knows the opinion I have of you. There’s heaps you’ll find to flatter you, Miss Trosdale, but I’d like you to remember not one of the lot maybe would do for you what I would.’

‘I really do not know how to thank you, Mr. Kerry,’ said the girl, decidedly taken aback by this statement.

‘I don’t want you to thank, now, or ever. I want to do something for you, if it is only to make you laugh ; you don’t often get a laugh out of Serle, I’m sure. There’s no

fun in him—no more than in a March wind.'

'We must not keep Miss Trosdale standing in the cold,' declared Selwyn, as a sort of commentary on the Irishman's remark. They were in St. Paul's Square—indeed, at Mr. Trosdale's door—and a deadly fear had come over him that Madge might ask Mr. Kerry in. If so, they certainly never would get rid of him.

'Speak for yourself!' indignantly retorted the other; 'who ever thought of keeping her in the cold? Good-night—or rather good-morning—Miss Trosdale; and Heaven bless you.'

'Good-night — or rather good-morning,' repeated Madge, giving him her hand. 'I have passed a most enjoyable evening.'

'Likewise I—it was a foretaste of heaven,' rejoined Mr. Kerry, looking up at the sky.

'If you are going home I will walk part of the way with you,' suggested Selwyn desperately, for he deemed it not wholly impossible a proposal of marriage might follow before Madge re-entered her home. 'The night is beautiful.'

‘So it is,’ agreed Mr. Kerry ; ‘and as you are always fond of a walk,’ with a wink Madge failed to see, ‘you may as well take it with one that’ll keep you out of harm. Once more good-night, Miss Trosdale.’

She stood on the threshold, looking after them for a second. When they had walked a few paces, the two men, moved seemingly by one common impulse, turned, and, seeing her, took off their hats, which greeting she acknowledged by waving her hand—then she closed the door.

As she did so, Mr. Kerry groaned like one in severe physical pain.

‘She’s like a jewel in a swine’s snout !’ he declared pathetically.

Selwyn glared at him askance, too angry to speak.

‘You and Trosdale’s the swine—but she’s a jewel beyond price,’ went on the other in delicate explanation, perfectly unmindful, if he ever knew it, of Solomon’s rendering of the same matter.

‘I am very sure you are not in a condition to say what she is,’ retorted Selwyn, provoked beyond endurance.

‘Do you mean you think I am drunk?’

‘I do.’

‘That all comes of the way you have of measuring other people’s corn in your own twopenny-halfpenny bushel. It’s a habit you’d best get rid of—for it’ll grow on you. And for the rest, I would have you know that I am soberer than yourself.’

‘Then I must be drunk indeed!’ said Selwyn scoffingly.

‘You can tell that best. It is not a matter for me to judge of—only, remember, it was you said it, I didn’t.’

‘I wish you would walk a little faster. We shan’t get any sleep at this rate.’

‘And who cares if we don’t? Who would want any sleep after parting with such an angel?’ And finding prose inadequate to describe Madge’s perfections, Mr. Kerry, leaning against a convenient lamp-post, broke into song:

‘Oh, my luve’s like the red, red rose
That’s newly sprung in June;
Oh, my luve is like the melodie
That’s sweetly played in tune.’

‘Then she is not in the least like your

singing,' said Selwyn, making an ineffectual effort to move his friend.

'You may as well let me alone. I'll stay here till I've done,' answered Mr. Kerry, gazing rapturously up into the heavens, which apparently inspired him to compose a verse entirely original :

Oh, my luve is like yon pale, pale moon
That sails serene through azure sky ;
Oh, my luve is like the bright, bright tear
That beams so tender in her eye.'

'Don't you think you'd better be getting home, sir?' suggested a policeman at this moment.

'No, I don't,' replied Mr. Kerry.

'You can't stay here, you know, wearing out the lamp-posts——'

But Mr. Kerry was far too much excited by his poetic triumphs to listen to the voice of reason.

'Let me alone, man,' he said. 'Your love isn't like the pale, pale moon.'

'No, she ain't,' agreed Policeman V. very decidedly.

'But mine is,' declared the enamoured swain with persuasive pathos.

‘Well, if she is, that is no reason why you should rouse the street.’

‘Do come along, Kerry,’ entreated Selwyn, in an agony lest Madge’s name should be blurted out. ‘I don’t want to stay here all night.’

‘Get along with yourself instead of dictating to your betters. I’ll stay here till morning—till mor—er—ning—do—huth appear.’

‘Come, sir, you must move on; we can’t have this.’

‘What’s the row, Stevens?’ asked an inspector who was passing at the moment.

‘Only a gentleman who is in liquor and won’t go home, because he says his love is like the moon.’

‘So—she is. Isn’t she, Rafferty?’

‘Oh! it’s you, Mr. Kerry, is it! Hadn’t you better be thinking about bed?’

‘Bed! Who wants to go to bed?’

‘I should think you did. See, I am going your way. Will you let me walk with you?’

‘Yes; heavenly night for a walk, isn’t it? What a good thing you came up when you did—saved a row. For two pins I’d have knocked that impudent fellow down. He

objected to my singing. I have been singing all the evening. I have been at a party.'

'There can be no doubt about that.'

'Slap up party—dancing—supper—the height of diversion; but the liquor wasn't good. Take my advice, Rafferty, and never go anywhere that the liquor is doubtful.'

'There was plenty of it, I suppose, anyhow,' surmised the inspector.

'Such as it was. Ah! Rafferty, look at that moon; isn't this a night for love and lovers! Do you remember that place so lonely—a place for loveyers and loveyers only?'

'I can't say I do, sir.'

'Man, you have no soul! Well, now, as it seems—hold your arm steady—you are dragging me off my feet the way you lurch. What was I saying?—oh! as you are a dumb animal without sense or discernment, I will sing you Judy Callaghan. Do you know Judy Callaghan?'

'As well as I do my prayers.'

'Faith! and if you were one of these heathenish English that would not be saying much. Do you know Judy Callaghan, Serle?'

‘No; and I don’t want to know her.’

‘For that very speech then you shall. Come round here and give me your arm—this fellow is not able to bend his the right way. That is better. Now be careful where you are going, and don’t pull me over. See there, you are not a bit better than Rafferty. Walk slow, or I can’t sing.’

‘For heaven’s sake, don’t try.’

‘You’ll spoil your voice, sir,’ added the inspector.

“Domine dirige nos,” which being translated means “Devil a bit”—my uncle taught me that. Ah! he was the learned man. If he hadn’t dug with the wrong foot it is Pope of Rome he might have been.

“Oh! my love is like the pale, pale moon
That sails so calm through azure sky”—

‘You were going to sing Judy Callaghan,’ interrupted Selwyn.

‘Ah! I thought that would fetch you. How does she begin, Rafferty?’

“’Twas on a windy night,” said the inspector, thus appealed to.

‘So it was. Now hold hard, both of you,’

and in a sort of mirthful whoop Mr. Kerry broke forth :

“ ‘Twas on a windy night,
At two o'clock in the morning ”—

What do you mean, dragging me along till I haven't a puff of wind left in me?—

“ ‘An Irish lad so tight,
All wind and weather scorning,
At Judy Callaghan's door,
Sitting on the palings,
His love tale he did pour,
And this was part of his wailings.” ’

‘I wouldn't take on so, sir,’ advised the inspector, as Mr. Kerry showed symptoms of bursting into tears. ‘She wasn't worth it.’

‘And that's true,’ said the vocalist. ‘But don't be interrupting me. See, the song gets livelier now,’ and he essayed a little fling by way of accompaniment, which tried the powers of his supporters to keep him up.

‘Sing if you must, but for heaven's sake don't dance,’ entreated Selwyn.

For answer, Mr. Kerry opened his mouth wide, and shouted in a beautiful *staccato* :

“ Only say,
You’ll be Mrs. Brallaghan,
Don’t say nay,
Charming Judy Callaghan.”

‘ You had best not make such a noise, sir ;
somebody may be wanting to go to sleep.’

‘ Indeed, and that’s just what she did,’ and
Mr. Kerry went on :

“ You lie fast asleep,
Snug in bed and snoring.”

I don’t think it was right to put that in,
Rafferty. No lady ought to snore.’

‘ Many a one does though,’ ventured the
other.

‘ There, I’ll sing no more. You are both of
you deaf adders. Besides, here we are at
home ; come in—come in and have some
whisky that never paid the Queen—God
bless her and keep her from rogues and
robbers, a half-penny. Serle, you feel in
my pocket for the key. No, Rafferty, you
mustn’t go without a glass. Well, if you are
both sworn teetotalers, more’s the pity—
that’s all I have to say. Many thanks to
you for your entertaining company.’ And
having so spoken, Mr. Kerry, as sober ap-

parently as any judge, found his latch-key for himself and walked into Miss Dormer's hall with great steadiness and dignity, leaving Selwyn at liberty to return to St. Paul's Square, which he did in a state of mind impossible to describe.

Two things had been revealed to him during the course of the evening: one, that he thought social gatherings, such as Mrs. Gibbs' soul delighted in, weariness; the other, that his fraternal feelings for Madge were all nonsense—he loved her—he had loved her from the first.

And this knowledge was not a pleasing revelation to him. It came upon him with a shock—bringing with it none of the rapturous exultation young men almost invariably experience when first they eat of the tree and their eyes are opened. As a rule, the fruit seems sweet enough at first, whatever it may do afterwards; but Selwyn did not so regard his new possession.

Doubt, jealousy, difficulty, with a vague sense of disloyalty, all oppressed him as he hurried through the familiar streets, which looked white and unreal in the moonlight.

His life seemed unreal, somehow, too—he had cut adrift from the old safe moorings and was floating he knew not where, on a stream, the current of which grew swifter and swifter. He could not think—his mind felt restless and unquiet—he longed to be alone in his room, where he could look out on the solemn graveyard and consider the great changes wrought by only a few hours.

What would Madge's father say when he heard a young Assistant-Surveyor was in love with his daughter? He had views for her, Selwyn knew; but those views might not include Mr. Serle as a future husband.

There were lights in the sitting-room window as he reached the door. How earnestly he hoped Madge was not waiting up for him; how nervously he pushed open the door; how he started when he heard Mr. Trosdale's voice saying:

'I am glad you are back at last. Come in—come in.'

Mr. Trosdale was seated at the table looking over some papers.

'I have great news for you!' he exclaimed,

‘glorious news. Shut the door, man, and sit down. Ashford has been here this evening, and I am to start for Glasgow with him in a few hours. He has an introduction to Piddick, the largest ironmaster in Scotland, probably, except Baird. Ashford feels confident he will take my furnace at once.’

‘But I thought you were going to that house in Sheffield,’ said Selwyn, a little confused by this complete change of plan.

‘So I was; but there would appear to be some screw loose with those Sheffield people. I don’t know what it is, and I do not care, now I am in communication with Piddick. You do not seem to realize the enormous importance of such an introduction.’

As the young man had never even heard Piddick’s name before, Mr. Trosdale’s impatience seemed a little unreasonable; but Selwyn only answered:

‘I am very glad indeed to hear the matter is at last being put in motion. You start by the first train, I suppose?’

‘Yes; and I have waited up in order to speak about the office. You will do your best to keep matters going till I return?’

‘You know I will. How long do you think you shall be away?’

‘A few days—a week at most. You will finish that account, and send it up to Somerset House. I have signed it.’

Selwyn felt a little surprised at this statement, for he knew Mr. Trosdale must have returned to the office in order to affix his name; but he made no remark, only said the account should be completed as soon as possible.

‘I wish Thistlethwaite had not chosen to absent himself just now,’ remarked the Surveyor irritably.

It was not a gracious observation, as his Assistant evidently felt, for he answered:

‘He has never showed at the office since you got him that allowance for overtime, during which he did not do an hour’s work.’

‘When he likes to buckle to,’ retorted Mr. Trosdale, ‘he can get through as much in a day as any other man in a week.’

‘That may be—only it is a pity he likes to buckle to so seldom.’

‘You can’t have everything,’ replied the head of Third Liverpool; ‘and at any rate we

have more important matters now to think of than Thistlethwaite. He may be back to-morrow. If not, I dare say you can get on without him till I return. If you are in any difficulty, Kerry no doubt will put you right. Madge tells me you took him to Mrs. Gibbs' party. I was glad to hear it. He is a useful fellow, and a little attention of that sort is well bestowed. Here is an address which will find me, but don't write unless necessary. Above all, do not worry me about the office. Everything must wait till this business is settled. There is no more that we need say, I think. You had better get to bed. I shall lie down, though it scarcely seems worth while. When we meet again, I hope you will have to congratulate me on being a rich man.'

'From my heart, I hope so too,' answered Selwyn; and he was quite sincere, though he believed riches would sign the death-warrant of his own desires.

For long after he went upstairs, he sat by the window looking over the graveyard, bathed in moonlight, thinking upon all that had happened since the first evening he

entered Mr. Trosdale's house. His boyhood, his early home, seemed in a few hours to have receded to an incredible distance, while at the same time his future had grown terribly dark.

At last he went to bed, intending to rise when he heard Mr. Trosdale stirring; but, contrary to his expectation, he fell into a sound and dreamless sleep, from which he was only awakened by Ann, who brought him warm water and the information that it was very late.

All in a hurry he dressed and went downstairs, to find breakfast laid for himself alone.

Beside his plate was placed a little note from Madge, saying she intended taking advantage of her father's absence to spend a few days with her friend Mrs. Graham.

'Ann has promised to take every care of you,' she added.



CHAPTER VII.

AN OFFICIAL VISIT.

ON the Monday morning following Mr. Trosdale's departure, Selwyn went to the office with the intention of unravelling a troublesome mass of accounts, to which he had hitherto been unable to devote himself.

Thistlethwaite not having returned, he was forced to depend on the assistance of Holt, to whom he had talked very seriously, with the intention of trying to train him to take the senior clerk's place.

It was discouraging work, for Holt's intellect was not of the brightest, and his mind had an irritating tendency to elude the grasp like a marble which is stepped on. He made sufficient progress, however, to give his tutor

some hope concerning the future, but on that especial morning Selwyn would have given worlds for Thistlethwaite's clear head and exhaustive knowledge of taxes.

Soon after noon, having spent three hours in unavailing efforts to understand a system of accounts he firmly believed to be fraudulent, Mr. Trosdale's Assistant decided to seek Mr. Kerry's help, and went across to that gentleman's office, which he found in possession of a person whom he knew by sight as an accountant in a small way of business.

There had clearly been some considerable divergence of opinion, for the visitor, in a towering passion, was storming at Mr. Kerry, who stood beside his desk looking perfectly calm, and uttering not a word in acknowledgment of the abusive torrent poured forth upon him.

'You—you—you insolent fellow!—do you hear me?' the accountant stuttered. 'I'll report you to Somerset House—I'll go up this day and see the Secretary—I'll find out whether a man is to be kept waiting here for thirty minutes before he gets a decent answer

to a civil question, and has to go away without it after all. Do you think, sir, that we who pay taxes have no right to come here? Is this a private office, or one kept up to transact public business? D——n it, sir, why don't you answer me?'

'Is it me you're speaking to?' inquired Mr. Kerry, quite as if he expected to be told it was not.

'You—you,' repeated the man, his voice quivering with passion, 'is it you? Of course it is; and I demand a reply couched in proper language. Let me tell you that the time for riding rough-shod over the public has gone by, sir.'

'I've told you what to do! Appeal to the Special Commissioners.'

'But they won't be here for three months. I might as well appeal to the devil!'

'You'll be able to do that later on,' said Mr. Kerry courteously.—'What is it, Serle? Do you want me? Accounts? Wait a bit, I'll come now. I've just about done with this civil gentleman, so I'll bid him good-morning.'

And with this remark he slipped past the

angry accountant, as that individual was preparing for another outburst, and followed Selwyn into Mr. Trosdale's office.

'I'm glad to be shut of that pig!' he observed. 'He's given me a headache shouting.'

With Mr. Kerry's aid the complicated accounts resolved themselves into a very simple matter; and in an hour Selwyn had completely mastered them, and exposed their fallacy. Then having, with his friend's help, made an additional assessment of the proper amount on the too clever firm, he threw down his pen with a sigh of relief.

'Come and get some o-zone, you white-hearted chicken,' suggested Mr. Kerry. 'Faith, Serle, it's lucky for you that your uncle didn't make you an accountant or an average adjustor.'

They went out, and bent their steps to the Landing Stage. It was Mr. Kerry's favourite walk, and one which in the first part of their acquaintance the two had frequently taken together.

'Come here,' said Mr. Kerry, when they reached the end of the stage, where there is

a platform on a lower level than the rest of the structure, which makes a not uncomfortable seat, commanding a fine view down the river. 'Come here; it's warm and sunny, and we'll have a talk like what we used.'

'I am afraid I must not to-day,' answered Selwyn. 'I do not like leaving the office longer than I can help. Let us have some dinner—I'll stand it. Where shall we go?'

'That Welsh ale is mighty good at the place you took me to a while since,' said Mr. Kerry, in a softly genial tone. 'We'll go there.'

Selwyn and Mr. Kerry had not left the office more than half an hour, and Holt, not expecting visitors, was indulging in a quiet nap on two chairs behind the partition, when the sound of some person entering disturbed him.

'That's not one of the public,' said he to himself. 'It'll be Tom, and he's coming through. I say, Tom, bring us in some coals—that's a good fellow!'

'Who are you speaking to, sir?' inquired a sharp voice; and Holt sprang up as if he had been stung.

It was not Tom who presented himself, but a tall gentleman, scrupulously neat, and carrying a small black bag. He regarded Holt severely, but the clerk, not at all abashed, opened the attack by asking angrily :

‘What do you mean by coming into the Surveyor’s private office? The public are expected to stay outside the counter.’

‘No doubt,’ observed the visitor drily. ‘The public are not expected to see what I see. But there is no need for excitement, my young friend. I know Mr. Trosdale personally; he will not consider this an intrusion. Have the goodness to hand me one of those chairs, and tell me when he will be in.’

The manner of the stranger’s speech cowed Holt, and as he handed a chair he answered :

‘Of course, if you are a friend of Mr. Trosdale’s, it’s all right. But I couldn’t know that. He won’t be back at all to-day.’

‘Indeed! He is ill, perhaps?’

‘No; he’s away on some business.’

‘And when is he likely to be back?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Really! Then perhaps you can tell me where his house is? I have particular reasons for wishing to see him.’

‘You won’t find him at his house,’ replied Holt, who now began to feel quite at his ease, and inclined to indulge his passion for conversation. ‘You’ll have to go to Glasgow, if you want to see him.’

‘Oh! then he has gone to Glasgow on business?’

Holt nodded.

‘How unfortunate! I might as easily have come in earlier in the day.’

‘But you wouldn’t have seen him then. He’s been away since the middle of last week.’

Mr. Trosdale’s friend gave a little nod, which might have indicated surprise or disappointment; and then, without replying, took a black book from his bag and referred to it.

‘Mr. Serle is not here either?’ he said, lifting his head from the book.

‘He’s out just now, but I don’t think he’ll be long. He’s gone to dinner.’

‘I think I will wait and see him then. Can you give me a newspaper?’

Holt felt sure that he was on safe ground, and produced the *Referee* from his coat-pocket, apologising for its being crumpled.

‘I do not know this paper,’ said Mr. Trosdale’s friend, ‘though I have frequently heard of it. It seems to be a sporting print.’

‘The best published,’ Holt replied. ‘I always like to have it on Sunday morning, so that I can read it in bed.’

‘Humph!’ and the visitor spread the paper out on Mr. Trosdale’s desk. ‘Now, I will not detain you. I imagine you have work to do.’

Somewhat unwillingly Holt went to his seat in the outer office, and resumed his work. Before long he had an uneasy feeling that the stranger was watching him intently, though when he turned round he always found the paper interposed between them. He had noticed that the visitor had very keen eyes, which, even while he was talking, darted round the office, taking accurate note of everything, and a vague suspicion stole

over him that after all it might not be a private friend of Mr. Trosdale's who appeared so determined to see some one in authority. It might be as well to get Kerry to come and see whether he knew the man. He was about to carry out this notion, when the stranger remarked :

‘ Mr. Serle is away longer than usual, surely ?’

‘ Oh no ; he is sometimes longer than this.’

‘ You seem short handed here. Have you not another clerk ?’

‘ Thistlethwaite ? Yes, but he's away now.’

‘ What, he too ! Then you have to do the bulk of the work ?’

This was a supposition which exactly pleased Holt.

‘ Ay !’ he said, ‘ and without either thanks or pay for it. Thistlethwaite's away half his time, and as often as not there's no one but me and Mr. Serle in the office for days together. So it is no wonder the work's always in arrear ; it's not to be expected that two people can do the work of four, more

especially when they do not get an extra halfpenny for it.'

'Very hard, certainly. But the Board grants extra allowances, I think. Surely Mr. Trosdale told me that a handsome allowance for overtime had been granted to his clerks a few weeks ago.'

'Yes, they did grant overtime. Thistlethwaite swore he wouldn't do the work without it; and so Mr. Trosdale wrote up, and said it couldn't be done. But I never had a penny of it. Directly he got the money Thistlethwaite went off on the booze, and we haven't seen him since, except when he comes to draw his pay. It's not fair upon me; I don't know why I stand it. Here am I, slaving like a black till I can't tell you what time at night, without getting a red cent for it, while Thistlethwaite's off to Blackburn, or some such place, with a lot of rowdy fellows, and he won't come near us till he has spent it all, and then likely as not he'll have to take a holiday with his old friend D.T.'

'Who is Mr. D. T.?' asked the stranger.
Holt laughed noisily.

'Do you not know what D. T. is?' he asked.

‘I have not that pleasure.’

‘You may count yourself lucky then. D.T. is *delirium tremens*.’

‘Oh! and an old acquaintance of Mr. Thistlethwaite?’

‘I believe you,’ and Mr. Holt winked.

‘I’m afraid,’ remarked the stranger, ‘you have a great deal to put up with. It seems to be the old story of the willing horse. But does not Mr. Trosdale interfere to protect you, and to secure you a fair share of the extra pay?’

‘Not he!’ exclaimed Holt indignantly; ‘so long as he isn’t bothered he doesn’t care a tinker’s damn what happens. If I was to tell him anything about it, my time in this office ’d be short. Besides, he doesn’t want to know. Five days out of six he only comes here to sign papers, and goes away again in an hour.’

Mr. Trosdale’s friend smiled gravely, and was about to pursue his inquiries, when the door opened and Selwyn entered.

‘Mr. Dandison!’ he exclaimed, stopping short. Then, recovering himself, he advanced into the office, and said: ‘I am sorry I did not know you were coming, sir.’

‘No doubt you are,’ remarked the Chief-Inspector grimly; ‘but be consoled, Mr. Serle—I have found your clerk most communicative. I assure you I have passed the last half-hour very profitably.’

There was a caustic dryness in his tone which made Selwyn long to wring his neck, especially when he recollected what awkward disclosures Holt had it in his power to make. Rapidly he surveyed the position, and saw at once that the Chief-Inspector must have wormed out most, if not all, of the things it was important to conceal. Six words with Holt would have been of inestimable use, but it was impossible to obtain them. Looking up, he became aware that Mr. Dandison’s eyes were fixed on him, and with something of the courage of despair in his voice he said :

‘Do you propose to make a long stay in Liverpool?’

‘Long enough to satisfy myself upon some points about which I am rather doubtful now. I shall be here to-morrow, and possibly also on Thursday. By-the-bye, Mr. Serle, if you know Mr. Trosdale’s address, you had better telegraph to him that I am here.’

‘So he knows Trosdale’s away!’ Selwyn reflected. ‘The devil take Holt’s chattering tongue!’ Then, speaking aloud, he said, ‘Holt, give me the telegram forms.’

To do Holt justice, he would not, for anything short of a very large inducement, have betrayed the movements of his chief, or revealed anything concerning the office, if he had known to whom he was talking. His alarm when he heard Mr. Dandison’s name was ludicrous, and, even in the midst of his own perplexity, Selwyn could hardly help laughing at the nervous way in which the clerk sprang up to execute his order. After having upset a bottle of red ink over a fairly written assessment, and thrown a tumbler down into the coal-scuttle—mishaps which Mr. Dandison regarded with the same steady and sarcastic look of comprehension—the telegram forms were produced, and Selwyn was beginning to indite a rather long message to his chief, when the Inspector said very quietly :

‘As the telegram is on official business, I will sign it, Mr. Serle.’

Selwyn, cursing him inwardly, tore up

the form which he had already written. In place of it he wrote another, simply announcing the fact that Mr. Dandison had arrived and wished urgently to see him. This Mr. Dandison deliberately perused and signed, after which Selwyn gave it to Holt, with instructions to send it off at once.

‘Well,’ Mr. Serle, the Chief-Inspector began when Holt had gone, ‘what am I to say to all this?’

If any hope still lurked in Selwyn’s mind that Mr. Dandison would make a lenient use of the advantage he had gained, the tone in which these words were uttered must have dispelled it. The Chief-Inspector’s gray eyes shone with a steely glitter, his thin lips were tightly compressed, and the voice which came from between them was as cold and keen as the east wind which at that moment was blowing in the streets. But the fighting instinct was strong in Selwyn that day ; and as it needed only the appearance of things going against him to make him reckless of consequences, he answered with perfect hardihood :

‘Pray make your question a little plainer, Mr. Dandison. I am in a difficulty how to answer it.’

‘I do not wonder at that. Really, Mr. Serle, considering how small your opportunities have been, you have picked up the habits prevalent among Surveyors of a certain class with the most extraordinary aptitude. Six months, is it not?—you will correct me if I am wrong—since you came to me in Somerset House; and I should have said then that your prospects were as good as those of any man in the service. At first you made a good impression on me, an excellent impression.’

‘Well, sir; and in what way have I forfeited it?’

The Chief Inspector shrugged his shoulders.

‘If you can ask such a question as that,’ he said, ‘I am afraid it is almost hopeless to continue our conversation. But I understand I am not to take your question literally. You put it rhetorically; in fact, you wish to oper out the ground. Well, then, I will tell you, sir. Mr. Trosdale, your Surveyor, has been absent from this office without leave.’

‘That is not my affair,’ Selwyn answered.

‘Not yours? Whose then? Pray, Mr. Serle, do not trouble me with these fantastic replies. If Mr. Trosdale should set

himself to rob an absent man of his goods, would you by maintaining silence abet him in his purpose? Of course you would not. But you allow him to plunder the Board of Inland Revenue without remonstrating. It was your duty, sir, to have informed me, unofficially, of what was taking place.'

'Then I may tell you,' answered Selwyn, 'I would rather throw up my appointment. I am neither a talebearer nor a detective; and I understood I was sent here to assist Mr. Trosdale, not to spy upon his actions.'

'To assist him in his lawful work, sir, not in defrauding the Board,' the Chief-Inspector replied, and a dark flush overspread his face. 'You are hard of understanding, Mr. Serle; wilfully so, I imagine. But even you must know that no member of the Civil Service may absent himself from duty without the leave of his official superiors.'

'It is not for me to discuss Mr. Trosdale's actions; but I might retort that you yourself, Mr. Dandison, told me there was no fixed rule of office-hours, and that so long as the work was done, a Surveyor might be a law to himself.'

‘Those are my words quoted with a cunning twist,’ the Chief-Inspector said; ‘but since you challenge me in that way, bring me your books. I will see how your work stands.’

It was with rising courage that Selwyn produced his books; for almost from the beginning of his sojourn with Mr. Trosdale he had assumed the entire charge of the correspondence in the office, and his books were perfect models of what such things should be, thanks to Mr. Kerry’s instructions and to the help which he obtained at odd times from Thistlethwaite. The Chief-Inspector went through them carefully, taking note of everything, and asking searching questions about almost every entry. But Selwyn was on ground which he had carefully studied, and on which he was a match even for the veteran who cross-examined him. Mr. Dandison was unable to detect any faults in the books; and when he closed the last, and admitted that they were all well kept, Selwyn felt something of the exultation experienced by Quentin Durward after having crossed swords with Dunois.

When he had finished, Mr. Dandison rose

and looked through the window at the clock.

‘I do not think there is anything more which we can do to-day,’ he said; ‘by to-morrow, no doubt, Mr. Trosdale will be here. Good-afternoon, Mr. Serle. I wish to see the other Surveyors before they go.’

If Mr. Dandison really imagined that there was any danger of the departure of the other Surveyors before they had seen him, he much mistook the natures of those worthy gentlemen—or rather, the habits which after years of official life had become more natural than nature. The news of the Chief-Inspector’s arrival had been disseminated by Holt on his way out with the telegram for Mr. Trosdale. Every Surveyor, Assistant-Surveyor and clerk in the building had read that message and discussed it before it was despatched. Anxiety was on every countenance; books which had lain untouched for weeks were produced and hurriedly indexed; official papers brushed away into locked drawers; porter bottles carried off into Tom’s room; the clerk to the Clerk to the Local Commissioners summoned, in case he might be wanted.

Meanwhile, all down the corridors heads were constantly peeping from the doors, gazing intently in the direction of Mr. Trosdale's office as timidly as a number of rabbits peering cautiously from their holes at eventide, while at the least sound every man darted back to give warning. Now and then one bolder than the rest stole up to the door round which interest centred, though no sound of voices could possibly be heard through its thick oak panels; and returning, drew on his imagination for hints and whispers, which quickly spread to the adjacent rooms in the shape of the wildest rumours. Now it was said that Selwyn had been heard to call the Chief-Inspector a liar; now that a scuffle had taken place, and that Mr. Dandison was calling for help.

As often happens, all this nervousness was thrown away. When at last the great man issued forth, it was only to pay a brief visit to each of the three other Surveyors, and to assure them with the blindest of smiles that he would see them again on the following day. Then he betook himself to his hotel.

‘At last he has gone,’ said Selwyn. ‘You

may lock up, Holt ; I shall not be back to-night.'

'Won't you stay a while?' asked the clerk; 'they'll all be here late to-night. We might go through the assessments.'

'I won't stay ten minutes,' replied Selwyn angrily. 'I shall be ready for Mr. Dandison to-morrow, if he has any inquiries to make. And look here, Holt, next time anyone comes and asks you to talk about other people's affairs, just try not to do it. You've caused more mischief to-day than you will repair in a hurry.'

'I'm sure,' said Holt, beginning to whimper, 'I'm sure I wouldn't have said a word if I'd known who it was. How could I tell he was the Chief-Inspector? Trosdale 'll sack me over this!'

'If he does,' said Selwyn, as he went out, 'it will be a very good day's work.'

In the passage, as if he had been meaning to come in, stood Mr. Kerry, with a shade of sadness upon his expressive countenance. He shook his head gloomily when he saw Selwyn.

'Well,' he demanded, 'what did the black-

hearted thief want? And who put him up to coming?’

‘I don’t know. I believe that, like a vulture, he smells his prey miles off.’

‘I’m not sure,’ said Mr. Kerry, with a mysterious nod, ‘but what there’s people in these offices that watches what we’re all doing pretty sharp. If Dandison had a hint to come down now, it wouldn’t be the first time one has been given him.’

‘What do you mean? Do you suppose anybody——’

Mr. Kerry jerked his thumb over his shoulders in the direction of Mr. Cramsey’s door.

‘If I thought that,’ said Selwyn, taking a step in the same direction, ‘I’d go in and smash his head.’

‘Phooh! come back!’ said his friend, catching him by the arm. ‘It’s myself will help you to do it some day. But you’ll have to grow a bit, Selwyn, my boy, before you kick old Davey’s shins. Besides, you’re in a bit of a mess with Dandison, and it won’t make things any better for Davey to complain to-morrow that you’ve broken three of his ribs.’

‘I believe you’re right,’ said Selwyn; ‘but, as I live, I’ll be even with him before long.’

‘Don’t shout like that, man!’ said Mr. Kerry, pulling his friend down the corridor. ‘Can’t you keep cool? A stone doesn’t get any lighter by lying snug in your pocket for a bit. I’ve a thing or two to say to old Davey myself; and you and I can make one job of it.’

When they emerged into the street, Mr. Kerry was about to turn in the direction of Duke Street, but Selwyn disengaged himself.

‘That’s not my way,’ he said. ‘I can’t come with you to-night, Kerry; I must go home.’

‘Why must you?’

‘I expect Mr. Trosdale will be back, and I want to go to meet him.’

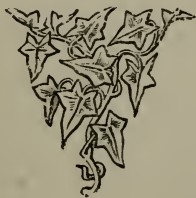
‘Tell me what Dandison said, then.’

‘I can’t remember all he said,’ Selwyn answered. ‘I was in a passion, and I said a good deal myself which I dare say was very foolish. Let me go now, Kerry; I’m tired. I’ll see you to-morrow.’

Mr. Kerry stood looking after his friend as long as Selwyn remained in sight, and then,

remarking: 'There was a stranger on the bars last night—I misdoubted me when I saw him,' he went home, looking as sorrowful as it was his nature to look.

Before returning to St. Paul's Square, Selwyn went down to the Landing Stage, where he took two or three turns up and down. It was a fine evening, and the air, though keen and cold, was bracing, and had the scent of the sea in it. He would probably have remained there longer, for his head was aching, and the stage being almost deserted, he found the place soothing to his excited brain. But in the midst of his third turn, he saw Mr. Dandison in the distance, and feeling at the moment a strong repugnance towards meeting that gentleman, he escaped up one of the bridges.





CHAPTER VIII.

MR. KERRY INTERVENES.



SELWYN had hardly reached the office on the following morning when Mr. Dandison appeared, carrying, as on the previous day, his small black bag.

‘At what time do you expect Mr. Trosdale?’ was his first inquiry.

‘I fear he will not be here at all to-day. He telegraphed to me last night and explained that he was detained on most important business.’

‘Show me that message, Mr. Serle.’

‘I cannot, Mr. Dandison,’ Selwyn answered; ‘it related partially to private matters. I have told you precisely what the contents were, so far as they referred to Mr. Trosdale’s return.’

‘Very well, sir. Now be so good as to write down Mr. Trosdale’s address in Glasgow for me.’

Selwyn wrote out the address and handed it to Mr. Dandison.

‘Do you wish to make any further inspection of the office this morning?’ he asked.

‘Not at present. Later in the day, perhaps, I shall see you again. Pray keep yourself in readiness, lest I should want you.’

With these words the Chief-Inspector went out. Holt slipped after him, and came back in a few minutes, saying :

‘He’s been and sent off a telegram himself.’

‘To Mr. Trosdale, I suppose,’ said Selwyn. ‘Well, that’s no business of ours, Holt. You had better get to work.’

The morning passed very quietly. Selwyn bearing Mr. Dandison’s words in mind, did not go out to dinner, but sent Holt for some bread-and-cheese, which he ate, wondering what the next few days had in store for him. He saw, of course, that Mr. Dandison was in no mood to pass lightly over any breach

of discipline, and though he had certainly committed none himself, yet there were only too many apparent in the office, for which it seemed that he was to be made answerable. If matters were driven to extremity with the Surveyor, it could hardly be that he should escape. The fall of Trosdale would be a great one, and was likely enough to bring down his Assistant also.

From these unpleasant thoughts Selwyn was roused soon after noon by the entrance of Mr. Dandison. That gentleman wore a very placid look ; but those who knew the Chief-Inspector dreaded him most when his appearance was serene.

‘Well, Mr. Serle,’ he said cheerfully, ‘at your luncheon? What, finished already! I had twice your appetite when I was a young man. Now, I have a question to ask you. It seems that we shall have to do without Mr. Trosdale to-day.’

‘Then you have heard from him, sir?’

‘Yes. It appears to me that Mr. Trosdale can hardly have been absent so long as I was given to understand ; because only on Saturday this important document reached

London, signed, you see, by him. How do you explain that ?’

‘It was signed,’ said Selwyn, ‘before Mr. Trosdale left.’

‘But when completed ?’

‘On the day on which it was sent up.’

‘Then it was signed when it was still incomplete ? That is to say, that this, a most important account, never received the Surveyor’s supervision ?’

‘It is quite correct,’ Selwyn said.

‘That is not to the point. You must know that the Surveyor’s signature is regarded as a guarantee that he has checked the accuracy of the work.’ He paused, as if he expected Selwyn to say something, but receiving no answer, he continued, with a shadow of greater sternness in his voice : ‘It is very unsatisfactory, Mr. Serle—discreditable, in fact—that you should have lent yourself to such a proceeding. No, don’t interrupt me. Listen to what I am about to say. I have telegraphed to Mr. Trosdale, telling him that he is suspended by order of the Board for being absent without leave from his office. I do not think it probable that

Mr. Trosdale will return again to this district, so I have requested Mr. Cramsey to take charge of it. You will regard yourself as being under his orders, and give him every assistance. I have considered your own position, and I do not see that any serious steps need be taken at present. You are very young, Mr. Serle ; and though I cannot conceal from you that your official reputation is much damaged by what has occurred, there is no reason why, under another Surveyor, you should not retrieve your character.'

'I have no wish to dissociate myself from Mr. Trosdale,' said Selwyn proudly. 'I desire to share the responsibility for whatever blame attaches to him.'

'Pray, Mr. Serle, do not talk in that foolish manner,' said the Chief-Inspector impatiently, 'or you will oblige me to reconsider what I have said. I am willing to shut my eyes more than I am quite justified in doing. Do not force me to open them. I have explained matters sufficiently now,' he added, moving towards the door as he spoke. 'I hope we shall meet next time under pleasanter circumstances.'

‘Plausible scoundrel!’ muttered Selwyn, as the door closed behind Mr. Dandison; very unfairly, for towards him, at all events, the Chief-Inspector was showing himself just and moderate.

Mr. Dandison had already taken leave of the other Surveyors, and was about to depart from the building, when he was waylaid by Mr. Kerry. Ever since the Chief-Inspector’s sudden arrival Mr. Kerry’s state had been one of the utmost consternation. Had he himself been implicated in Mr. Trosdale’s misdeeds, he could not have shown himself more nervous about the view taken of them. He was quite unable to work; he was perpetually starting up as if he meant to rush into Mr. Trosdale’s office and interfere on behalf of Selwyn; then, recollecting himself, he would sit down again with a mournful groan. He returned no answer when spoken to, and drove several applicants to the verge of idiotcy by looking at them with a vacant stare, as if he had not heard their questions. He gave snappish replies to his clerk’s anxious inquiries whether he were ill; and finally, when the man persisted, Mr. Kerry swore roundly at him.

The cause of all this derangement was not merely Mr. Kerry's active sympathy with the misfortunes of his friend, though that was great. But being, as has been indicated before, very prone to superstition, he had persuaded himself that all the prophecies of evil which he had uttered to Selwyn had brought about their own fulfilment, and that if he could only have held his tongue Mr. Dandison's visit might not have happened at all, or might have taken place at a more opportune time.

'What ailed you, Daniel, to prophesy about the poor lad?' he said to himself, over and over again. 'You used to be a decent fellow, Dan, that wouldn't hurt a crow, let alone a shrimp of a boy that couldn't protect himself. Prophesying is like throwing stones into the air: they're sure to hit somebody when they come down. You'd best give up the trade, and look out for a better one.'

In this strain he had communed with himself ever since leaving Selwyn on the previous evening, and having gradually arrived at such a state as to consider himself the

prime, if not the sole, cause of the mischief, determined in consequence 'to put in a word for the lad,' come what would.

Accordingly, when Mr. Dandison was walking quickly down the corridor, on his way out of the building, Mr. Kerry contrived to meet and accost him.

'Before you go away, sir, I should like to say a few words.'

'Certainly,' replied the Chief-Inspector, who never refused a request of this sort. 'Come in here, Mr. Kerry; I have not much time, but I can spare you twenty minutes.'

He led the way into the little room which has before been mentioned as reserved for the use of the Inspectors on their visits. Mr. Kerry looked carefully this way and that before entering the room: and having assured himself that no one was in sight, he cautiously closed the door.

'Well,' said Mr. Dandison, seating himself at a desk which stood in a corner by the window, 'what is it, Mr. Kerry?'

'I thought,' said the Irishman, in a timid voice, very different from his usual reckless

manner, 'I thought you'd excuse me interfering, but I wanted to speak about the lad Serle.'

'Ah, yes! What about him?'

'They say things weren't quite as they should be in there,' continued Mr. Kerry, indicating the office he meant with a jerk of his head; 'and we've got an idea that you are not as well pleased as you might be.'

Mr. Dandison raised his eyebrows, as if he wondered how such an idea could have got abroad.

'I'm sure I never said so, Mr. Kerry. From whom did you hear that?'

'Ah!' said the Irishman mysteriously; 'there's ways and means of finding out secrets without much talk. What I tell you is generally believed in this building, anyway.'

The Chief-Inspector glanced up carelessly.

'Perhaps you have good reason for believing that there were irregularities in Mr. Trosdale's office?'

'It's not for me to say,' replied the cautious Assistant. 'If a man shows me his face, Mr. Dandison, I look at it; but if he turns his

back I look at that too, without trying to squint round so as to see what he's got in his hands. I see what I'm meant to see, sir, and not much else. It would be a mighty good thing if there was nobody hard by trying to see more.'

'You are very discreet, I have no doubt. But you did not stop me, and request this conversation, merely in order to inform me that you could be blind at convenient times?'

'No,' said Mr. Kerry, 'I did not. I want to tell you something about young Serle.'

'Well, Mr. Kerry, pray go on. I am quite ready to listen to you.'

'It's this,' the Irishman said, hesitating a little. 'If you're going away with the notion that Serle's a careless worker, and not to be trusted, you're wrong entirely, and I'd be glad for you to know it. There isn't anyone in these offices, or in the whole service, who'd be worth more to you if he was rightly managed.'

'I have not told you that I am dissatisfied with Mr. Serle, Mr. Kerry. Again I ask you where you obtained your knowledge.'

The Assistant-Surveyor waved his hand impatiently.

‘We’ll let that pass,’ he said. ‘I know pretty well how matters stand. What I want to say is that Trosdale’s doing the lad no good. Now, I’m not saying anything against Trosdale. I don’t know anything but good of him—barring his temper—and if that isn’t what it might be, he didn’t make it himself.’

‘I suppose not,’ remarked Mr. Dandison, seeing that Kerry stopped as if waiting for an answer.

‘Well, then, he’s a good enough fellow. But he’s spoiling Selwyn. He’s got the lad under his thumb, and makes him do what he likes. You don’t know Serle, perhaps; but he’s just the fellow to be led by the nose by any man who likes to take the trouble.’

‘I won’t dispute your knowledge of your friend’s character. But I still don’t see exactly the point you are trying to make.’

‘It is this,’ said Mr. Kerry, with an obvious effort; ‘I think Serle will never do well till he’s separated from Trosdale.’

‘I may inform you that Mr. Trosdale has

been suspended from his duties by order of the Board.'

'I'm right sorry to hear it. But that won't separate him and Serle, because they live together.'

The Chief-Inspector looked at Mr. Kerry to see if he had anything more to add.

'Oh!' said he, after assuring himself the other had said all he intended. 'So Serle lives with Mr. Trosdale. How did that come about?'

'I don't know,' answered Mr. Kerry; 'I wish I did, and I'd like well to see him in some other place, for he's a fine young fellow, and clever, too.'

The Chief-Inspector paid no attention to this repeated eulogy of Selwyn.

'So,' he observed, as if to himself, 'they live together. That explains everything. It's all clear now.'

Then, turning to Mr. Kerry, he added:

'Well, Mr. Kerry, I suppose you wish me to consider this as said in confidence. I think you did rightly to speak to me, and you may depend I shall know how to make a proper use of what you have told me. By-the-

bye, how do you stand yourself for promotion ?’

‘ I’m very near the top,’ said Mr. Kerry, with a gratified smile. ‘ There’s only Webb before me.’

‘ Are you not aware Mr. Webb has got his district ? He went to Aylesbury last week.’

‘ Then I’m top,’ observed Mr. Kerry.

‘ I do not think you’ll be left there long ; but we shall see. Good-bye, good-bye. I’ve left myself hardly any time.’

And with these words Mr. Dandison departed.

Mr. Kerry was considerably uplifted by the last remark of his chief, which he naturally interpreted as a kind of promise that his prospects would be borne in mind by the man most capable of advancing them. He felt, too, that he had dropped good seed into Mr. Dandison’s mind in another way, and done Selwyn a real kindness ; though he was quite aware that young gentleman might not so regard his interference.

‘ But why need he know anything about it at all ?’ argued Mr. Kerry. ‘ He’s just like a baby, poor boy, and he doesn’t know what’s

good for him. Lord! it's lucky he's got a friend with a power of discretion, and more care for his interests than he's got himself.'

Self-communing after this comfortable fashion, Mr. Kerry reached the door of Trosdale's office, and went in with the intention of consoling Selwyn, and administering to the wounds which Mr. Dandison had made the healing balm of wisdom. Being in good spirits, he naturally began by attacking the pillar, which for some days past had enjoyed a well-earned rest. He was not quite so successful as usual, however, and failed to reach his last pencil-mark.

'Blessed St. Patrick! I'm getting stiff,' he ejaculated. 'It's a curse—no less—that divil of a Chief-Inspector brought with him, and he's left it fixed on us. Come along out here, Selwyn, and hold me up while I get my leg up over my name, or I'll be ashamed to look at it.'

This appeal was very promptly answered, but not by Selwyn. It was Mr. Cramsey who thrust his head round the partition, and observed:

'I wish you'd go back to your office, I do,

Daniel Kerry—or, if you must come in, I'll trouble you to do it without making a noise like that. How am I to get through all the work the Board has set me if I'm not left quiet ?'

The sight of Mr. Cramsey produced an instant change upon his Assistant. He desisted from his athletic attempts, and thrusting his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat he advanced upon his chief.

'So ye're here already!' he observed acrimoniously.

'And high time too!' returned Mr. Cramsey. 'Ah! it's a shocking thing when people neglect the work they're paid to do! Poor Mr. Dandison—he was quite upset. I never saw a man look so white and ill as he did when he told me I must come here. So as soon as he'd gone I just gathered up my papers and came across.'

'And where's Serle?'

'He's out; he's out far too much. I've got my eye on that young man, I tell you. I'm not going to stand any of his nonsense. He was barely civil to me just now.'

'What did he say?' inquired Mr. Kerry curiously.

‘Never mind what he said, or what he didn’t say. I’m too busy to talk to you. Go and get on with your own work.’

‘And it’s likely you will be busy,’ retorted Mr. Kerry, not noticing this suggestion. ‘You’ll have to get up early and go to bed late, and many a day ye’ll sit here with an empty inside and a sore head before you’ve made the assessments for two districts.’

‘Ah! but the Board won’t forget me, you may be sure. It’s all done for their sakes and for Dandison’s; and you may take my word they’ll be grateful. It’s a hard thing to have to take up another man’s work; and I tell you the work in this district’s not been done in *my* way, and I can’t speak plainer than that. There’s a cupboard behind you that’s locked, but I mean to know what’s in it, if I have to break it open with the poker.’

‘I’d advise you to speak to Trosdale first,’ said Mr. Kerry.

‘What for?’ asked Mr. Cramsey contemptuously. ‘Trosdale isn’t anything here now, any more than Tom the porter. I’m master in this office, and high time too. It seems to me there’s not been half the correspond-

ence there ought to be, and it's my belief it has been locked up there and never attended to.'

'You're a fool, then, for your pains,' said Mr. Kerry rudely. 'And you don't know an honest man when you see one. Serle would no more bottle up his work like that than you'd play the spy on other people in these offices, and report their doings to the Chief-Inspector.'

This shot went home, and Mr. Cramsey turned livid with suppressed rage. As Mr. Kerry said, in relating the scene afterwards to Selwyn, 'I touched him on the raw, mister.' The Surveyor judged it prudent, however, not to notice the remark, and only said :

'I don't think much of that young man. I never did. You may trust him if you like, but then I'm responsible, and you're not.'

At that moment Selwyn entered the office.

'I say, Serle,' cried Mr. Kerry, 'what's in that cupboard?'

'Some things which belong to Mr. Trosdale,' answered Selwyn; 'his private property.'

'No official papers?'

‘Certainly not. Mr. Cramsey has all the papers that are in the office. I have already told him so.’

Kerry glanced triumphantly at Mr. Cramsey, but was met with a sneering laugh.

‘Seeing is believing,’ he said. ‘I mean to sweep this office clean. We must have that cupboard opened at once.’

‘It will be very inconvenient to clear it to-night,’ said Selwyn, ‘but if you insist on it I suppose it must be done.’

‘You’re mighty fond of talking,’ answered Mr. Cramsey, rather taken aback by this ready compliance. ‘It can wait till to-morrow. Suppose we do some work now, and let Kerry go and do his.’

And with that Mr. Cramsey threw himself back in his chair, and with a large coloured silk handkerchief wiped away the drops of perspiration which had collected on his head.

‘You’re mighty polite all of a sudden,’ said Mr. Kerry. ‘I’m not quite fit for such high society ; so I’ll bid you good-day, Mr. Cramsey. I’ll take care it’s pretty well known in these offices how well you’ve behaved, and what nice things Dandison said about you.’



CHAPTER IX.

MR. TROSDALE EXULTS.

WHATE next evening Selwyn met Mr. Trosdale at the Central Station. The Assistant in Third Liverpool was by no means in good spirits; but his chief made up for all shortcomings of that sort.

‘Capital news!’ he cried, as soon as he caught sight of his young friend; ‘the best of news!’ and he allowed Selwyn to take his bag, and slipped his hand within his arm. ‘Piddick is mightily pleased—never saw a man so pleased—says I may reckon on a large fortune, which, of course, I knew before. He advises me not to sell outright—a royalty is the thing. I cannot be troubled looking after such petty details, so you must manage all that for me. I shall be able to afford a roaring salary.’

‘What arrangement have you made with Piddick?’ asked Selwyn, who, though disenchanted with Third Liverpool, and dissatisfied with the whole Inland Revenue, was not so much uplifted by the glorious future Mr. Trosdale indicated as might have been expected.

‘With him, none yet. It was his father who made the business, and though the old man is virtually out of the firm, still the son says he never takes any important step without consulting him. He is ill at the moment, but whenever he is able to be about again, Piddick will lay my affair before him. Meanwhile he introduced me to the best people in the neighbourhood of Glasgow; they were all delighted, and advised me to see Hodson, who really is the king of the trade; so I shall go to London next month. He’s out of England at present—been wintering in the South of France it seems. That’s the way those wealthy fellows play with business, while the men who really make their money for them have to eat their hearts out till it suits them to come back.’

Selwyn had hoped to hear of some profitable settlement having been come to with

the great Scotch house, and his spirits were considerably dashed when he found he was expected to exult over the absent Hodson's possible approval at some unnamed future date.

'Do you think that Hodson is likely to entertain the invention?' he asked diffidently.

'Likely! why, man, don't I tell you everyone without exception fell in love with the furnace? Harrison and Edwards said it would double their profits, and J. K. Frazer told me to name a lump sum for the patent, and he would see if we couldn't come to terms.'

'That is gratifying, certainly; such firms ought to know the value of the thing.'

'Of course they ought, and they do. What can anyone want more than such recognition? I would have struck a bargain with Frazer; but Piddick said if I really wished to sell—which he by no means advised—Hodson, or even Phipps, would give me ten times as much. Now this is my first chance of fortune, and I won't part with it for a mess of pottage.'

By this time they had made their way out of the station, and were passing round St. George's Hall towards Dale Street.

A cold, raw wind was blowing, which made itself felt through the thickest clothing, and the Surveyor shivered as he wrapped his travelling-rug, which he had thrown over his shoulders, closer round him.

‘And what about Dandison?’ he asked; ‘what brought the meddling rascal down just at this time? I’ve often said he suborns the clerks to send him secret information, and here is a proof of it. Do you know what he came for?’

‘To see you, I suppose. He came direct to our office.’

‘Then some one must have told him I was away. There was no reason on earth for his choosing this time.’

‘Whatever his reason might be,’ answered Selwyn, ‘he was in a very nasty temper, and I am sorry to say things haven’t gone well.’

‘Why? how?’

‘Did you not receive a telegram from him yesterday?’

‘No, what was it about?’

‘To say that you were suspended.’

‘Suspended!’ Mr. Trosdale stopped as

though he had been shot. 'Suspended! pooh! stuff! nonsense! rubbish! Suspend me!' he went on, beginning to walk very rapidly, and talking the while very fast, 'after having been thirty years a Surveyor! The Board wouldn't sanction such a thing. They will never confirm Dandison's act.'

'I am sure he will push it very hard,' said Selwyn doubtfully.

'Let him,' said the Surveyor. 'But what a nasty trick to serve a man,' he continued, finding Selwyn made no remark; 'isn't it, now? An old friend too. Why, I went fishing with him once. Did I never tell you about that? It was when I was down in Hampshire—Dandison never liked me afterwards, because I filled my basket and he caught nothing. You should have seen him slashing away with his line at the banks, and catching brambles and all sorts of things except what he wanted. I said to him, "Dandison," I said, "you're hurting the weeds more than the fish,"' and the Surveyor laughed discordantly as he recalled the one day in all the years when he had scored over the Chief-Inspector.

Selwyn made no comment ; in truth, he felt too anxious for trivial speech.

‘Suspended!’ repeated the Surveyor; ‘Lord, what does it matter? I declare I won’t fight it out with him. I’ll take my pension and cut the whole concern. Eh? Don’t you think that would be the best thing to do?’

‘I think I’d wait until we see how things go with Hodson,’ said Selwyn sensibly.

As he spoke they stopped before the house in St. Paul’s Square, and while pulling out his latchkey the Surveyor remarked :

‘It is very strange that I cannot make you understand my success with Hodson is a practical certainty.’

Next moment they were in the hall, where Madge met them.

‘Welcome home,’ she said, kissing her father; ‘how very long it seems since you went away.’ And then she gave her hand to Selwyn, whom she had not seen during the interval; in truth, he had not desired to see her, knowing how completely at sixes and sevens affairs were.

‘Long!’ repeated Mr. Trosdale, who was, however, gratified by her remark; ‘no child,

it is not very long, though a great deal has occurred since I left here' ('Indeed there has,' thought Selwyn). 'How well you are looking, Madge; New Brighton agrees with you, my girl,' and he patted her cheek complacently, for already he saw her, in his mind's eye, 'taking her proper position' as the heiress of that enormous fortune he was to receive from Hodson or his equivalent.

'After all,' said the Surveyor, some ten minutes later, at supper, 'there is no place like one's "ain ingle neuk," as the Scotch call it. I am glad I came home, Madge. Piddick wanted me to spend a little time with him, but I felt I could not stop away any longer.'

'And how did you get on?' asked Miss Trosdale. 'Did you like the Glasgow people? Were they kind to you?'

'Kind!' repeated the Surveyor. 'If I'd been their brother come home from foreign parts with a fortune they could not have been kinder. All day it was "Let me drive you out this afternoon," and "Come and stop the night with us," and "We have a few friends for dinner, and I can't say how much we should feel honoured if you would join

us." I had to promise to spend a fortnight with Piddick in the summer at Arran. It is impossible to tell you how eager and friendly he was about the patent ; over and over again he assured me it would not be long before I stepped into a fine fortune.'

'I never saw you look so well and happy before,' said Madge, stealing a glance at Selwyn, who looked neither well nor happy.

'Because you have always before seen me under a cloud,' answered the Surveyor ; 'when I am out of this hateful town I can breathe. Away from taxes I feel a man again. You have never known your father, Madge, in the past ; but I hope you will know him in the future. You would not believe in me, but when you find everybody at my feet you will know I was not the poor self-deluded creature you imagined. Ah ! there is nothing so beautifying, nothing so convincing, as success.'

'And God grant it may come to you,' thought Madge ; and though she made no audible answer, her eyes were full of such compassion and tenderness as Selwyn had never seen in them before.

Lately a great pity for her father had been taking possession of Madge. Happier herself, she found time to lament that anyone else should be unhappy, and now the great pity and love she had felt for her mother seemed to pale when contrasted with the greater pity she felt for a man who rejected love, and had spent all the best years of his life in pursuing a shadow. For if success should come to him in the future, how could it compensate for the misery and humiliation of the past ?

Anyone who had heard the Surveyor talk that night might have been excused imagining he was 'fey,' to borrow an expression from the land which made him so welcome. He talked incessantly of what he had done in the past, what he meant to do in the future ; and Madge sat listening almost in silence, speaking only when her father seemed to expect an answer, and glancing furtively from him to Selwyn, and from Selwyn back again to her father, as if expecting to read written in plain characters on their faces the thoughts which were in their minds.

She did not need to seek far for the Surveyor's thoughts. The exultant light with

which his eyes glittered from beneath their shaggy brows was enough to tell her he was dwelling on the future, chafing at the delay likely to arise before he grasped his prize, and yet examining and dwelling on it with all the eager joy which a child has in thinking of a pantomime. It was then Madge realized that in their attitude towards external things she and her father were, and must remain, as far asunder as the poles. No lapse of time could bridge the gulf which separated them, or enable her to look on the future with the sanguine hope of which the Surveyor seemed to have a bottomless spring within his breast. Madge would willingly, at least for the time being, have shared his hope, and cast away her fears. 'For what?' she asked herself, 'what good can it do him or me that I don't believe he will succeed? It will not make failure a whit less certain, or pave the way to any prosperity in the future for either of us. Why cannot I think and feel with him, even if he be wrong, and enjoy at least the pleasure of thinking he is right?'

It was useless, and Madge knew it as she

watched her father, and answered to the best of her capacity a string of comments upon the Glasgow manufactures — disparaging mostly ; for when her father was busied with the contemplation of Martin Trosdale's talents he had rarely much toleration for those of other people.

As for Selwyn, he listened to Mr. Trosdale's utterances with a sinking heart. His interview with Mr. Dandison was too recent to permit him to set such hopes as the Surveyor offered in the balance against the trouble he felt confident was in store.

He had not lost faith in the furnace or its inventor ; but he knew if he were in the Surveyor's shoes he should prefer his salary to fifty such birds in the bush.

Harshly as he considered Mr. Trosdale had been treated, it was impossible for him to help acknowledging the head of Third Liverpool ought to hold no one save himself responsible for his suspension. Work more badly performed, accounts worse kept, an office in which less discipline prevailed, it would have been hard indeed to find in the United Kingdom. It was not merely that

the Surveyor did almost nothing himself ; but he actually disliked people about him who entertained the disagreeable opinion that something ought to be done. He detested being asked about any official matter. He regarded the men who paid taxes as a public nuisance, and the Board that received those taxes as a greater nuisance still. He entertained the largest ideas on the subject of salary, while his notions concerning earning it were narrow as notions could be. To do as little and get as much as possible was the condition to which discontent and overweening self-opinion had brought him, and now that the inevitable result, bound to come sooner or later, had arrived, he refused to recognise the gravity of his position, but babbled on as a child might have done, utterly blind to his danger. To Selwyn, who, if he erred at all about the matter, erred on the side of over-content and over-caution, the Surveyor's action seemed that of a man who does not trouble himself, though aware the ship under his feet is sinking, because he sees a sail far away on the horizon he believes will eventually save him.

Through all Mr. Trosdale's joyful and triumphant discourse, the words the Chief-Inspector had spoken rang like a discord. That Mr. Dandison would make matters most unpleasant for the truant Surveyor he felt satisfied ; and the very vagueness of his knowledge as to what lay in such an enemy's power added a harassing uncertainty to his reflections. Concerning his own future, also, he felt by no means at ease. Mr. Kerry had remarked that morning :

‘ You'll have to sing small for a while, and eat a good lump of humble-pie, my boy, before you'll scrape right, and maybe you'll think twice before you chaff a man you know nothing about again, if it's taking his skin off to wash he is, let alone his waistcoat. I always said, if you mind, Davey would get his knife in you, and you see it has all come true. And that's not all ; if you had taken my advice and not let Trosdale entrap you, you might have been nearly a made man by now. I told you from the first it was taxes you ought to take to bed and board with you, and instead of that, nothing would content you but Trosdale and his rubbishing old

boiler Cramsey says he's been fooling away the Queen's time on—though how Davey knows that beats me entirely. Likely as not now a mark is set against your name up in London, and when you get your promotion, if ever you do, you'll be sent to the Land's End, or Flamborough Head, or some other place at the back of beyond'—which assertion was by no means reassuring, even making every allowance for the agreeable way Mr. Cramsey's Assistant had of putting things; and not all the compliments Mr. Trosdale repeated, not all the assurances of Messrs. Piddick, Harrison, Edwards, Frazer, and many others united, that the furnace was the best and simplest furnace ever invented, could wipe out the recollection of Mr. Kerry's words, and Mr. Kerry's look when he uttered them.

These were the thoughts which were jangling through Selwyn's mind while he sat, silent, listening to his chief's monotonous talk; and so absorbed did he at length become in his unpleasant musings, that he finally forgot to try to look cheerful, and started like one waked from sleep when Mr. Trosdale revert-

ing for a moment to common affairs, asked suddenly :

‘ And how are you getting on at the office ?’

‘ Oh ! pretty well,’ answered Selwyn.

‘ Nothing new, I suppose.’

‘ Except what I told you.’

‘ Yes—yes, I know. How is the work ?’

‘ Heavy, but we manage it somehow.’

‘ Has Thistlethwaite been pretty steady ?’

‘ No ; he has been drunk ever since you went away.’

‘ Confound the fellow ! I’ll discharge him to-morrow.’

‘ He has been discharged.’

‘ By you ? Did you — presume,’ Mr. Trosdale was about to add, but Selwyn prevented him.

‘ No, I did not discharge him ; but he has been discharged, for all that.’

‘ That is another piece of Master Dandison’s impertinence. I declare I have a good mind to go down in the morning just as if nothing had happened—take no notice of him, eh ? It would be the most dignified course ; besides, you know, I never received that

telegram. Yes, certainly I will walk to the office with you in the morning.'

'I don't think I should,' answered Selwyn, who believed bloodshed would ensue if Second and Third Liverpool clashed together. 'Mr. Dandison has put a person in charge.'

'You, I suppose,' suggested Mr. Trosdale with a sneer.

'No, he has not put me in.'

'Who then? Holt perhaps,' said the Surveyor, in a tone which indicated he considered there could only be one deeper depth of incapacity than his Assistant's, which was the junior clerk's.

'Holt has been discharged.'

'Holt, too!' exclaimed Mr. Trosdale; 'heaven grant me patience! The insolence of the fellow!—a low upstart!'

'It is a very good thing Holt has gone. He did all the mischief, chattering fool!' answered Selwyn, rejoicing to think his chief's mind was diverted from the burning question.

'He always was a fool,' returned the Surveyor. 'But there are worse faults than folly. I do not mean to say Holt was ever efficient. But Dandison had no right to

interfere with my people. Who has the damned scoundrel dared to set in authority over my office ?'

'Oh, that does not matter now,' answered Selwyn, looking at Mr. Trosdale imploringly.

'It does matter, sir ! Answer my question directly. What are you hesitating for ? Come, Serle, no more beating about the bush. Are you my subordinate, or are you not ?'

'Certainly I am,' replied the unhappy young man, who knew he was not.

'Then tell me who Dandison has left in charge ; tell me at once !'

'As you will have it,' returned Selwyn desperately, 'Cramsey !'

With an oath, the Surveyor brought his closed fist down on the table with a bang which made what Mr. Kerry called 'the implements' rattle, and caused Madge, who was white from apprehension, to jump.

'I could have sworn it ! The ruffian—the imbecile—the coward ! Wait a little though, Master Dandison, and I'll make you laugh to another tune. I'll appeal to the country. I will have a question asked in Parliament. I

will hound him out of Somerset House. Cramsey! the sneaking, lying dog! He has been telling fine tales to Dandison, I'll be bound!

'Somebody must have told tales; but I don't exactly think it was Cramsey.'

'Why, what has been said? Let us have the whole story at once. It's too good to be doled out in instalments.' And the Surveyor laughed bitterly.

'I wish you would not press me now,' said Selwyn, who never thought Mr. Trosdale would talk before his daughter about the row at the office. Hitherto he had studiously endeavoured to keep taxes and St. Paul's Square as far apart as the two poles.

'I cannot imagine what it is you wish to conceal from me,' retorted the Surveyor. 'I had better know the whole matter at once, and I insist upon knowing it.'

'I have not much to tell,' answered Selwyn; 'but it appears, so far as I can gather, that Holt knew you were engaged in some business, and let the cat out of the bag.'

'Oh! he did—did he? Now I wonder if Dandison thinks I have sold myself body

and soul to the Board, and that I am bound to account for every moment of my time out of office hours to the magnates at Somerset House ?'

'I do not know ; Mr. Dandison spoke as if anything of the kind were contrary to rule.'

'Anything of what kind ?'

'Occupation—business !'

'I suppose I shall next have to ask for leave to eat my dinner !'

If Mr. Trosdale intended this remark as a question, no one present even tried to answer it.

'And then the point arises,' went on Mr. Trosdale after a pause, 'how did Holt know anything about my affairs ? He never got the information out of his own brain. Probably you assisted him to it. I do not mean intentionally, of course,' he added in a manner which conveyed the impression that was precisely what he did mean.

'I have never mentioned your affairs out of this house,' said Selwyn deeply hurt.

'Think again,' advised the Surveyor with a scoff ; 'not to your bosom friend, Mr. Kerry ?'

‘I have never mentioned your affairs out of this house,’ repeated the young man, ‘but I could give a shrewd guess who has.’

‘More enigmas. Really, the complications of which our friend Dandison is the centre seem endless. Well, who is the culprit, do you shrewdly guess?’

‘It may be a mere coincidence, of course,’ answered Selwyn, put on his mettle by Mr. Trosdale’s tone and Mr. Trosdale’s words; ‘but I saw Mr. Cramsey walking this afternoon in Castle Street with Mr. Ashford.’

For about twenty seconds there was a dead silence in the room; then:

‘I don’t believe it,’ said the Surveyor.

‘Oh, father!’ exclaimed Madge.

‘I do not,’ repeated Mr. Trosdale. ‘I would as soon believe myself guilty of treachery as Ashford; and it would be treachery for him to consort with that degraded porpoise. No, I do not believe it, Mr. Serle—your eyes deceived you; and if he, by an extraordinary coincidence, were walking through the same street at the same time as your present chief, or even speaking to him, as it is not impossible he was forced to do on

business, he never mentioned a word about my affairs. I would stake my life on that. Ashford is a man in a thousand—in ten thousand—true as steel !

Having delivered himself of this expression of faith, the suspended Surveyor walked out of the room and retired to rest, without going through the ceremony of wishing anybody good-night.

‘ I am so sorry, I am so sorry ! ’ said Madge, when she heard the door bang ; and looking at her, Selwyn saw that face which was dearer to him than all the world softened and beautified by the divine touch of a tender trouble. ‘ What can I say to you, but that I am sorry ? ’

‘ I do not mind,’ he answered bravely, as a man with a broken arm might declare it did not hurt ; ‘ your father is scarcely himself to-night——’

‘ He is not, indeed,’ she interposed, ‘ or he never could have spoken so to you.’

‘ And I told him what perhaps I ought not. I don’t know. At all events, what I did not intend to tell him yet.’

‘ I am glad you told him—thankful. But

what is the matter at the office? What has gone wrong?’

‘Not very much,’ answered Selwyn; ‘only it unfortunately happened the Chief-Inspector came down while Mr. Trosdale was away, and we have all been having a rather bad time in consequence.’

‘But why is Mr. Cramsey put in authority? Has—has my father been dismissed?’

‘Dismissed! certainly not. The Inland Revenue people are bad enough, but they would not do a thing like that. They could not, indeed, if they would. No, the way the matter stands is this. As your father chose to take a holiday without leave, he now has to take a short holiday whether he chooses or not. If he will only keep quiet, and not kick against the pricks, everything will come right in a week or two,’ declared Selwyn, feigning a confidence he was far from feeling. ‘Do not look so downcast, Miss Trosdale. When the new furnace is bringing in ten thousand a year, we can laugh at Dandison and all his works.’

‘*When* the new furnace—*when!*’ Madge repeated. ‘Oh! my father—my poor, poor

father! You forgive him, don't you?' she pleaded, laying her hand on Selwyn's coat-sleeve. 'You can make allowances for him? You feel for him?'

'Indeed, indeed I do,' answered the young man. 'I am cut to the heart for him.'

'And you see he is sore and bitter about this affront which has been put on him. Though he talks so bitterly he——'

'Miss Trosdale, please do not say another word. I understand how vexed he is. I only wish I could take his trouble on myself. Are you not sure I would do anything to spare him?'

'I am sure. I do not know how to thank you. I——'

She stopped suddenly. There were times when she tried Selwyn almost beyond his power of self-control, and at that moment a passionate longing seized him to take her in his arms, and say, 'I love you! I love you! I love you! and utter the first words he had ever spoken of that language, the earlier tones of which are trembling, tender, and sweetly monotonous, like the notes a nightingale repeats over and over with little breaks and

pauses between when it begins its song, ere growing bolder it pours forth its soul in trembling cadenzas, and rippling rills, and tremulous shakes, and great gusts of triumphant melody.

He conquered himself then, however, as he had conquered himself before. She was so dear to him he would not have touched even the hem of her garment, if by so doing he might cause offence. But though a man may guard his actions and be careful of his words, his looks will sometimes, like wayward children, escape from his control, and tell secrets they were forbidden to disclose.

It was so at that moment. As Madge raised her lovely eyes to his face, she faltered and left her sentence incomplete; her gaze drooped, her hand slowly dropped from his arm; the knowledge which had come to him came also to her, but with an addition of which he was ignorant.

As he walked home in the moonlight he only understood that he loved; as her eyes fell, weighed down with a happy shame, Madge knew she loved and was beloved!



CHAPTER X.

MR. HARRISON.

IT was the morning of the sixth day after that on which Mr. Dandison left Liverpool—a morning so sunny, warm, and still, that as the Chief-Inspector strolled along the Embankment he felt inclined to loiter for a little while, and almost conceived the idea that he should like a holiday. There recurred to him suddenly the memory of just such another morning, when he had walked over the downs between Banstead and Epsom; it must have been a good many years ago, because Crosthwaite was with him, and he had not even spoken to the man for ten years. That was one only of many walks which he was then fond of taking, in which he was never at a loss for a

companion. The Chief-Inspector wondered with a momentary surprise where he should look for a companion if he purposed a similar walk that day.

But then he did not purpose it. It was well enough for a man in his youth to walk off his exuberant energies on the downs ; but at the age Mr. Dandison had reached, it is needful to husband one's resources, lest they should prove unequal to the demands made on them. He had no leisure for making new friends, he did not want companions. And yet how softly the sunshine fell on the river, while four great barges laden with hay were coming up the stream.

For the first time, perhaps, for many years, Mr. Dandison hesitated, and something like a wish that the old days were back again crept into his heart. Such a warm palpitating wish must have been somewhat startled at the leathery habitation in which it found itself ; certainly it did not abide there long, for in a very few minutes the Chief-Inspector had regained mastery over himself, and in fifteen at the outside he was seated at his desk, where he worked steadily through the

mass of his correspondence until the tramp of many feet announced it was ten o'clock, and that the clerks employed in the great building were hurrying through the courtyard to their respective offices. Mr. Dandison went to the window to watch them.

‘Idle dogs!’ said he to himself; ‘how easy it is to pick those out who lie in bed until the last moment, leaving themselves no time to dress properly. I should like to dismiss every clerk in this office who comes to it untidy in his person. If a man have no care for his appearance, why should he have any for his work?’

There was no one present to answer this question, so the Chief-Inspector began to pace up and down his room. It was a large apartment, arranged with scrupulous neatness; for Mr. Dandison was the most methodical of men. A huge bookcase filled the whole of one wall, stocked with a collection of works on Revenue and Taxation. Not those alone which referred to the Income Tax; for Mr. Dandison held that one branch of a subject could not be properly mastered without a careful study of others which were

cognate to it. Above the chimney-piece hung a fine photograph of the Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, a gentleman in whose opinion Mr. Dandison always expressed full confidence publicly, but whom he was commonly supposed privately to hold in the utmost contempt.

On this photograph Mr. Dandison now fixed his eyes, pausing in the middle of the carpet, as if some idea had suddenly occurred to him.

‘I wish some god or devil would tell me,’ he reflected, ‘why it is that a large department of State is always thought likely to be most efficiently governed by a man who has never had a day’s knowledge of its management. It is marvellous what a fatality there seems to be about appointments made from outside to the higher posts in public offices. Not one in three of the men appointed is better chosen than if it had been done by shaking together so many balls in a bag, and taking out that which came uppermost. God knows there was no lack of able officials in this office when our present Chairman was appointed ; but they were all passed over in

favour of a man who had had five years' experience as a private secretary !

It is not to be understood that these reflections were uttered aloud. Mr. Dandison was never guilty of the indiscretion of revealing such thoughts even to his trusted friend, if that person existed. It was, in fact, only at rare moments he allowed himself to formulate them at all, since he held that a man who dwelt habitually on any chain of thought was sure to reveal it in some way. But Mr. Dandison's heart was wroth within him at that moment ; and he had waxed indignant with many of his colleagues, for whom ordinarily he felt nothing but a tolerant contempt. In fact, the Chief-Inspector was dissatisfied with his position. He thought he detected in certain quarters a desire to shelve him. Up to a certain point his rise had been rapid ; so rapid that when he attained to the proud position of Chief-Inspector he was content to rest in it for a while, and to consolidate his work. But since then ten years had passed, and he was still Chief-Inspector.

The value of his services was admitted on

every side, but they met with no fresh recognition. On the contrary, his many merits had excited a feeling of hostility, which he well knew was gaining ground, and might one day prove too strong for him. There were instances in his own experience of men who had towered up quickly into such high position as to become the envy of their colleagues ; but in the end they had suddenly and quietly been submerged—drafted off into some other employment which at first appeared more dignified, but which involved the sacrifice of all real influence—and forgotten as surely as if the ground had opened beneath their feet.

At more than one extinction of this sort Mr. Dandison had assisted. His hand had pulled the wires so skilfully that the mechanism was never revealed. No one knew better than he how many invisible strings were dangling from the person of every man, ready to the hand of any enemy bold and unscrupulous enough to clutch them. No man, least of all a Government clerk, is free from secret foes, whose operations cannot be outmanœuvred. At any moment, the ground

which he thought was solid rock may prove to be so honeycombed and undermined as to afford only uncertain footing for the feet which had hoped to tread it securely till another step in the great staircase could be scaled.

Perhaps Mr. Dandison did not put the chances to himself so plainly as this. For, as the hangman never in his wildest dreams fancies that his own neck may feel the noose, so Mr. Dandison, who, like a staghound, had torn down many a gallant beast, never feared that the fangs of other hounds might one day be fastened in his own throat. Still, he scented danger; and though he was uncertain from what quarter the attack would come, was preparing himself to resist it.

His reflections were broken by the entrance of a messenger.

‘The Secretary would like to see you, sir.’

‘Thank you, Tomkins’—Mr. Dandison was always courteous to the messengers, who, however, by some instinct, unanimously hated him—and, following quickly upon Tomkins’ steps, the Chief-Inspector left his room.

He traversed several corridors, mounted a staircase, and entered at last an apartment

which looked out over the river. A gentleman who was writing at a table heaped with papers looked up as he entered.

‘You are early, Dandison?’ said he.

‘No; I have been here for an hour. I like to look through my correspondence before the interruptions begin.’

‘Well, it’s an excellent practice,’ said the Secretary. ‘Are you busy? Do you mind waiting two or three minutes until I have finished this letter?’

Mr. Dandison answered that he did not mind in the least, and waited patiently till his colleague was at leisure.

‘Now then,’ said the Secretary, throwing down his pen, ‘what is it to-day? Been away? Caught some poor devil out? Tell me his name. Hooper of Gloucester?’

‘Not Hooper,’ said the Chief-Inspector, as he produced a note-book and turned over the leaves; ‘though I don’t think he can go on long. My last inspection, as I told you, revealed a sad state of things there.’

‘I know, I know!’ answered the Secretary hastily. ‘If not Hooper, who is it?’

‘Well, I had reason to think that all was not

as it should be in Third Liverpool,' rejoined the Chief-Inspector, his voice even more cold and passionless than usual. 'Several hints reached me; and I was led to believe it might be well to run down and see for myself what was going on.'

'I wonder where the deuce you get your hints. Well, you went down, and you have not come back empty-handed? Out with it. Who is the culprit this time?'

'Trosdale.'

'H'm. He's an old Surveyor, isn't he? What has he been doing?'

'I have known for some time,' said Mr. Dandison, 'that he was neglecting his duties. The work has been very irregularly performed, and frequent claims for extra assistance were made which I did not think necessary; but which I passed until I had sufficient evidence in my hands. I should not have had enough yet, but for an accidental circumstance which excited my suspicions, and when I went down I found that Mr. Trosdale had been absent from his office for a week.'

'On leave, I suppose?' interposed the Secretary. 'Whom had he left in charge?'

‘He had left his Assistant, young Serle, in charge; but Trosdale was not on leave. I received no application from him.’

‘He should have applied,’ said the Secretary. ‘What reason did he give for not doing so?’

‘None at all. I was not able to see him.’

‘Ah, well! You had better write to him; he may have a satisfactory explanation to offer.’

‘I have not told you all yet. It seems that for years past he has been carrying on some private business, working at it in office hours. It was that which took him away to Glasgow—as I learned at the office; and, what is more, he has inveigled young Serle into it also.’

‘Carrying on a business? That’s bad. What kind of business?’

‘I was unable to satisfy myself on that point. As he would not return when requested to come back, it was necessary to temporarily suspend him; and so the matter stands.’

The Secretary rose and poked his fire, then, throwing his coat-tails over his arm, he turned towards his colleague and addressed him as follows:

‘Do you know, I almost fancy we are becoming too strict in these matters. I value your judgment on such points ; and, of course, no one of us has anything approaching to your experience. But, after all, this is just a question of how far it is expedient to go to extremities with an old servant of the Board, and a man who worked well for us in the past. It does not do to be too severe. You may depend on it these affairs cause great dissatisfaction among the staff ; and I am inclined to think we have drawn the reins tight enough lately.’

If Mr. Dandison felt any annoyance at this speech he concealed it admirably.

‘I quite agree with you,’ he said, ‘that it is not well to watch too closely for irregularities. I have a blind eye myself, and I am always inclined to overlook offences which do not seem very likely to be repeated. I could give you a dozen cases—a dozen, nay, a hundred—which I have never laid before you at all, because I thought there were extenuating circumstances ; though I doubt whether I ought to have taken the responsibility of concealing them. But this is no slight offence. Remember, we

have always set our faces against permitting any other occupation to be carried on by Surveyors.'

'Yes, yes; I know,' interrupted the Secretary; 'there was the case of Pennell.'

'Whom the Board dismissed for contributing articles to a country paper,' said Mr. Dandison. 'Yes, that was the most recent case; but there have been others; and I must say I think it very necessary to keep strictly within the rule.'

'No doubt it is. But the case of Pennell was not quite analogous to this. Pennell was a young man, and had barely any claim on us; whilst Trosdale is an old Surveyor within a few years of his retirement.'

'That makes the case worse,' observed Mr. Dandison. 'How can we maintain discipline if the old and experienced men in the service are to set an example of breaking its most stringent rules?'

'Well!' said the Secretary, 'after all it is not a question of taking any extreme steps at once. We must proceed in the usual way, I suppose. You had better write to him. Let us see what he has to say.'

‘I will draw out a short statement of the case,’ said the Chief-Inspector, rising from his chair as he spoke.

‘Are you going? Got another errand of mercy on hand, I suppose. Well, well, Dandison, I always said you worked harder than any other man I know; but that you make half your work for yourself.’

‘The system is in constant need of oiling,’ said the Chief-Inspector as he went out.

‘Vitriol is more in your way than oil, I should have thought,’ muttered the Secretary when the door had closed behind his colleague. He walked over to the window and stood looking out upon the river till the door again opened, and a messenger laid a mass of papers on his desk, remarking :

‘From Mr. Harrison, sir.’

The Secretary turned sharply round. ‘Ask Mr. Harrison to come down,’ he said.

Mr. Harrison was principal clerk in the Secretary’s office. His father and his grandfather had both spent their lives in the Inland Revenue, and from them he had imbibed the official traditions of a more tolerant age than this; when Somerset House was a kind of

preserve, kept up to be shot over only by the relatives of a favoured few, long before the voice of the Civil Service Examiner was heard in the land. Mr. Harrison accepted the new order of things perforce, but his heart was with the old ; and it was this, perhaps, which commended him to the Secretary's favour. Certain it is that, out of a number of equally qualified persons in the Department, Mr. Harrison had been several times selected by the Secretary for special work ; and he was commonly supposed to be very rapidly rising in the office. In person, he was tall and broad-chested, stooped slightly, wore a long brown beard streaked with gray, gold eye-glasses, dressed well, but plainly, and passed everywhere for a well-bred, courteous gentleman.

‘ Harrison,’ said the Secretary, ‘ don’t you know Trosdale ?’

‘ Martin Trosdale ? To be sure I do ! He and I were great friends once. We were at school together down at Croydon ; and I used to stay at his home very frequently in the holidays. You remember his father, don’t you ? What—did he die before you came

here? A rare old fellow he was—six feet two in his stockings; he had the most scorching way of putting a man down you ever heard. I remember his fastening on a young whelp from the Treasury, Lord John Upper-Crust's private secretary. He came into the room with his hat on, and began speaking in his hectoring way, when Trosdale rose and stalked over to him. He towered up head and shoulders above the young cub. For an instant he stood looking down on him, and then, 'What's this?' he began. 'Who's this? Can't you take your hat off yourself, sir? Let me be your valet then!' And he lifted the fellow's hat off his head, and flung it on the floor. You never saw such a change as came over my lord's secretary; he went away singing very small indeed.'

The Secretary listened to this account with an amused smile.

'I wish we had him here now,' he said. 'But it's his son who is in question at present. I'm afraid he's in a rather tight place.'

'What's the matter?' inquired Mr. Harrison anxiously.

‘Oh, Dandison and he have come across each other. I wish Dandison would try to work more smoothly with the Surveyors. He’s cursedly unpopular, I know—and no wonder. But the worst of it is that he makes himself so hated that men hear of it outside, and are shy of entering the service. I know that for a fact.’

‘He’s no great friend of mine, as you know,’ observed Mr. Harrison; ‘but it strikes me that Trosdale may be more to blame here than anyone else. He really is an admirable fellow—the best and nicest of men, when you know him. But he is full of angularities; an eccentric, obstinate creature, with his head full of cranks, and the devil’s own temper if any one of them is interfered with. I have not seen him for years; but I hear all this has grown on him; and it’s likely enough that he has given Dandison some ground for a row.’

‘Tush!’ said the Secretary; ‘suppose he is a trifle cross-grained? I don’t think much of that. Dandison should know how to manage these queer-tempered fellows. I know I could, with half the experience he’s

had. What do you think we had better do? Dandison seems determined to sting; he is quite in his nastiest humour.'

'I can hardly say, until I know exactly what has happened,' replied Mr. Harrison.

In a few words the Secretary repeated Mr. Dandison's story, adding a few impatient remarks of his own to the effect that these things were very annoying, and cost him more vexation than they were worth. When he had done, Mr. Harrison laid one arm on the mantelpiece and whistled gently to himself.

'I don't see my way out of it,' he said; 'from what I know of Trosdale I should say the probability is that he has been neglecting his office in order to work at some new fangled steam-engine, or superior mangle, or perhaps a coffee-pot on a new principle. He always had a fancy for such things. I don't know, of course; but I'm afraid there may be something in it.'

'Can't you run down and see?' suggested the Secretary; 'I don't mean officially; but you're going on leave next week—can't you take Liverpool on your way?'

‘ I’m going into Shropshire, certainly ; I might run over to Liverpool.’

‘ Do. See the man yourself, and just urge him to put aside whatever he’s about for a while, and mind his work ; and we’ll make a strong effort to pull him through. Mind what you’re doing though ; don’t say anything to compromise me.’

‘ I will not do that.’

‘ And you might see that young Serle, also ; so as to gather whether he’s all right. We’re so short of young men that we can’t afford to have one under a cloud. I shall depend on you to put matters straight.’

So it happened that three days afterwards Mr. Harrison presented himself before Selwyn, who was laboriously explaining the principles of the assessment of Inhabited House Duty to a terribly deaf old gentleman. This worthy taxpayer, having heard that the duty was charged at a lower rate upon shops than on dwelling-houses, had conceived the idea of exposing his domestic plates and dishes in his front window, and going in himself at intervals to buy them. He could by no means be made to understand that his brilliant

design did not turn his house into a shop ; and as his infirmities prevented him from comprehending Selwyn's arguments, he went away at last firmly satisfied that he had carried his point ; in which delusion he remained until the visit of the tax-collector.

'I should like to see Mr. Trosdale,' said Mr. Harrison, when the old gentleman had gone. 'Will you tell him that a friend of his is here ?'

'He is on leave at present,' said Selwyn, 'and his office in charge of another Surveyor.'

This speech reached the ears of Mr. Cramsey, and excited his disapproval. Ever since Mr. Dandison's visit, old Davey had remained on guard almost night and day, revelling in the opportunity of finding out defects in another man's work. When he heard Selwyn's statement that Mr. Trosdale was on leave, he thrust his head and half his fat body round the partition suddenly, and exclaimed pompously :

'What's that you're saying, Mr. Serle ? Why not tell the truth ? Mr. Trosdale's not on leave—it is not likely he'll be back here, sir, ever. I think he's gone for good.'

‘Is that Mr. Cramsey?’ said Mr. Harrison. ‘How do you do? Can I speak with you for a few minutes?’

Davey glanced at the stranger very suspiciously, wondering who this audacious person might be, who claimed acquaintance in such an offhand way.

‘I’m very busy now!’ he said, blowing out his lips; ‘if it isn’t anything very important, I’d be glad to be let finish what I’m doing.’

‘It *is* important, Mr. Cramsey. I see you don’t recognise me.’

A gleam of light broke out on Davey’s face, and merged into a puckered sort of smile, as he said, still doubtfully:

‘Why, it isn’t——? I do believe——’

Tired of the man’s stupidity, Mr. Harrison told him his name, adding that he saw plainly he was forgotten. ‘Oh, my dear sir!’ exclaimed Davey, springing to his feet, ‘I’m very glad to see you. What a long time it is since we met. Can’t you bring a chair, Mr. Serle? Sit down, Mr. Harrison. Ah! we’re in a sad upset here! Poor Trosdale! I feared it wouldn’t last! Many’s the time I’ve said to Kerry (that’s my Assistant, sir, a very

respectable young man, though dull)—I've said, "Poor Trosdale, I'm afraid he's breaking up." He didn't like me, you know, but I always tried to be a friend to him.'

And Mr. Cramsey wagged his big head in a melancholy way, and heaved a deep sigh.

'I know you always showed a remarkable interest in Trosdale's affairs,' said Mr. Harrison.

'I did! I did! more almost than in my own. After doing my dooty, of course, sir; for we always try to do that in Liverpool Two. Well, and how's everybody in the House? Mr. Dandison lost his cold? He had a shocking cough last time he was here.'

'He's very well, I think. And now may I trouble you to give me Trosdale's address, for I want to call on him. This is quite a private visit; I am on leave, taking a little holiday.'

'He lives with Trosdale,' said Mr. Cramsey, pointing over his shoulder at Selwyn. 'Mr. Serle, just write down Mr. Trosdale's address.'

Selwyn did so, and as he handed it to Mr. Harrison that gentleman rose.

‘Are you going?’ asked Mr. Cramsey in a disappointed tone. ‘You’re not in a hurry, are you?’

‘Well, yes, I have a good deal to do.’

‘Where are you staying? I should so like to have a talk with you. Suppose you come down to my place to-night. My sister ’ll be most pleased—she’ll toss you up an omelette. Do come; if you can, that is.’

‘You are very hospitable,’ answered Mr. Harrison; ‘I am sorry I am engaged this evening; and I may go back to Shrewsbury by a late train.’

‘Ah, well! good-bye, good-bye! remember me to Mr. Dandison. Just open the door, Mr. Serle. Good-bye!’





CHAPTER XI.

AFTER YEARS.

AS Mr. Harrison wended his way from the Inland Revenue Offices towards St. Paul's Square, the course of his reflections ran much as follows :

‘ I think I understand who has been the traitor in poor Trosdale's camp. Was there ever a man who bore villainy more plainly written on his face than Cramsey ? I would give five pounds to know for a fact that he has been playing the spy. Better not hint such a thing to that active-limbed young Serle, though—I am vastly mistaken if he is not a very passionate young man. Impetuous, I should think—just like Trosdale when he was young. He's a nice looking lad, but I must give him a hint not to be an ass, or

he'll get himself into trouble too. So Serle lives with Trosdale! Helps him, I suppose, in whatever folly he's engaged on! Poor Martin; it was kind of him, though, to take charge of the lad. It surprises me, too; he used to be so much averse to making new acquaintances. Ha! can this be St. Paul's Square?—this seedy, tumbledown dirty place! What can have induced Martin to live here? Cheap, I suppose. Poor fellow, poor fellow!

So saying, he mounted the steps and knocked. He was answered by the Surveyor himself, who stood a moment in doubt, as if he did not recognise his friend, then cried :

'Why it's Harrison, I declare! What wind blew you here, old fellow? Come in, come in. You are the last man I should have expected to see.'

'That's natural enough, I'm afraid,' replied Mr. Harrison, accepting the invitation to enter; 'and the fault is mine. But we used to be capital friends, Martin, and I don't think we need like each other less because it is so long since we met.'

'Less!' echoed the Surveyor, 'not a bit—more, I should say. But how came you here?'

I always fancied you were so busy gaping for promotion in the House that you dared not go away lest the bit should fall into another man's mouth.'

'That was said rather savagely,' Mr. Harrison replied, laughing. 'No, you are wrong, Trosdale ; I don't care about promotion very greatly now. I used to care, as you know ; and I minded disappointments a good deal then. But I have grown wiser, and let the motes go past me without catching at them.'

'Come into this room,' said the Surveyor, pushing open the door of the front-parlour. 'My daughter is here. Madge, this is Mr. Harrison, my old friend. I don't think you have seen Madge since she was quite a child, Harrison?'

'Miss Trosdale was much younger, certainly, and, if I may say so, less charming than she is now, when we last met.'

Madge came forward in some alarm on hearing Mr. Harrison's name. She was, in fact, in a fever of anxiety about her father. She could not but perceive that some trouble existed at the office, but neither he nor Selwyn would give her a clear statement of what had

happened, or of what there was to fear. And as in suspense the apprehension always outstrips the danger, Madge already saw her father reduced to beggary, and dependent on her own scanty earnings for support. In this state of nervous terror the slightest occurrence gave ground for new fears; and a sudden idea shot into her mind that Mr. Harrison had come as the bearer of ill tidings.

‘What is the matter with the girl?’ said her father roughly; ‘are you ill, Madge, that you stare at Mr. Harrison like that?’

By some secret process, Mr. Harrison divined, in part at least, the cause of Madge’s agitation; which was the easier for him from the fact that his own reflections about the Surveyor’s probable fate started from much the same point as hers.

‘Do not be afraid of me, Miss Trosdale,’ he said, smiling; ‘I am only an old comrade of your father’s—and admirer of yours, if you will let me say so—come to see him out of goodwill and friendliness.’

Madge quickly recovered herself on hearing these kind words, and held out her hand, saying:

‘Pray forgive me, Mr. Harrison. I am not often so foolish ; but I had been sitting by myself and thinking till I grew afraid of my own shadow.’

‘I am quite certain you and folly are total strangers,’ said Mr. Harrison, detaining her hand for an instant in his, and looking into her face. ‘You have your mother’s eyes, Miss Trosdale. I was her friend long before she was as old as you ; and, if years count for anything, they surely give me a claim of friendship on you too.’

‘I am quite ready to acknowledge it,’ answered Madge. ‘It is delightful to find a new friend, and that already an old one.’

‘Then I feel at home at once,’ replied Mr. Harrison, finding himself a chair, while Madge, with a nod and smile, left her father and his friend alone.

‘I envy you your daughter, Martin,’ said Mr. Harrison, crossing one leg over the other, and lying back in his comfortable seat. ‘She is a charming girl, and she has the eyes of a good woman.’

‘I don’t know what you mean by that,’ rejoined the Surveyor ; ‘but Madge is a very

good daughter to me. I could hardly have pulled through the last few years without her.'

He stopped at this, and with a wave of his hand directed at the shabby furniture, the faded curtains and the forlorn aspect of the square outside the windows of the house, he added :

'You see, we are very poor.'

'I see ; but why very poor, Martin ?'

'Why ? You were always fond of conundrums, Harrison ; but you might have remembered that I could never guess them.'

'My question is not a conundrum ; but never mind that. Just at present I want to look at you. Turn your face this way, Martin ; how many years is it since we have seen each other ? How much we must have changed, you and I ; though not in friendship ?'

'No, indeed,' replied the Surveyor, holding out his hand, 'it is too old with us. We will try to meet oftener in future. Do you remember the old house on Stoke Newington Green ?'

'I passed it the other day, and it looked so

desolate that I made up my mind I would avoid Stoke Newington in future.'

The Surveyor sat silent for two or three minutes, then he asked :

'Where are you staying, and what has brought you to Liverpool?'

'I am staying with my cousin at Shrewsbury, and I ran over here to see you, partly because I did not like to be so near at hand without coming, but principally, too, because it got wind in Somerset House, just as I was coming away, that you were in some trouble with Dandison.'

'He's a damned scoundrel,' said the Surveyor, wincing slightly, 'and I know he hates me. But let him do his worst.'

'His worst can't be very bad, you know, unless you have put yourself in his power. What I heard, however, made me fear he had found out something which he can use against you.'

'Well, that's true,' the Surveyor answered ; 'somebody (I believe it was Cramsey) reported to him that I had gone away without asking leave, and of course down he came by the very next train and frightened poor Mr.

Serle nearly to death with his bullying ways. I can't make out, Harrison, why that man is tolerated. He is insolent and overbearing ; has no more sense of decency than a donkey has of art ; he's as mean as he can be, and he loves to do a dirty thing better than a clean one. What can you say of a man who suborns one Surveyor to spy on the actions of another ?'

'I don't love Dandison much more than you do,' returned Mr. Harrison ; 'but allowing all you say, you know you put yourself in the wrong by going away without leave. Why didn't you ask for it ?'

'I declare, Harrison, you're as bad as Dandison. Am I to be told that after forty years' service I may not go away leaving a competent Assistant in charge of my district without begging for leave from a man ten years my junior ? The thing's preposterous.'

'But look here, you know, what you're saying now strikes at the root of all discipline in the service. There must be men in authority.'

'What is that to me ?' answered the Surveyor, and it seemed as if the sound of his own voice were lashing him into anger.

‘What is it to me whether discipline is maintained or not? Let Dandison see to that. Let him begin with the young men who have wrought but one hour, and leave those who have borne the heat and burden of the day to breathe under a less rigid restraint. Why should I have any care for the service, Harrison? With me it has been all giving. I gave it all my days, and my nights, too, for years. You know how I worked when I was at Nuneaton. So does Dandison. Everybody remembers the state that district was in when they sent me down there after young Watkins’ suicide. It cost me a year of the very hardest work I ever did to set matters straight. I left everything in order, and doubled the assessments. And what was my reward?’

‘I remember that very well,’ said Mr. Harrison. ‘I always thought you were shabbily treated over that matter.’

‘You admit as much, but Dandison does not. He told me one day last year that I was fortunate in having had the chance of showing what I could do, and that he could not see why a man should expect exceptional

reward when he is called on to perform exceptional labour for a time.'

Mr. Harrison nodded.

'I know. He told me something of the same sort. I said that his notion seemed to me absurd.'

'What did he say to that?'

'You know his way when he does not wish to answer. He raised his eyes from his work, said "Oh," and then dropped them again, and said "Ah!"'

Mr. Harrison imitated the Chief-Inspector's manner of using these ejaculations so accurately that Mr. Trosdale laughed in spite of himself.

'Come, that's right,' said Mr. Harrison. 'It does me good to hear you laugh, Martin. It sounds like old times.'

'Yes, I can laugh now,' answered the Surveyor, 'because I have ceased to expect common gratitude from my chiefs, and I have taken my future in my own hands, and reckoned it up. You know pretty well what a series of disappointments I had, and how many times I was refused fairly earned promotion, which was given to other men, in all respects my

inferiors. But you don't know—and you never can—how that disappointment ate into my soul, till it soured me and made me a discontented and wretched man. Then I turned my mind to other things. I used my brains and my talents; and things have turned out so well, that I tell you fairly I don't care a straw what Dandison does.'

'You speak as if you had had a fortune left to you.'

'I have not. But I have made one.'

'The deuce you have!' said Mr. Harrison, starting bolt upright in his surprise. 'Tell me all about it.'

Then Mr. Trosdale related to his friend the whole story of the invention of the furnace; from the day on which the first conception struck him. It was on a Good Friday, three years before. He had taken Madge into the country because he thought her looking pale and dispirited, as 'indeed, poor child, she was.' They had gone to Hale, where, having had tea in a cottage, and duly paid their homage in the churchyard to the memory of the 'Child of Hale,' they determined to walk on further into the country, and take a train

back to town from some more distant station. Dusk fell before they reached Ditton, and, as they stood waiting on the platform for their train, the night was profoundly dark, with a sharp north-east wind whistling over the marshes. The furnaces of the Ditton Iron-works were all aglow, casting out rosy flames from their tops, and flinging a broad band of light across the desolate country which surrounded them. In front of the furnaces black figures of men appeared and disappeared, as they came within the range of the furnace lights or passed beyond them into the gloom.

It was during those few minutes, and in the act of explaining to Madge the nature of the furnaces, that the Surveyor conceived his grand idea. It sprang quickly and easily into life, but its progress towards adolescence was slow and painful. If days stolen from his official labours, if nights watched away till daybreak found him standing haggard and weary over his work, if disappointments bravely borne, and depression combated, if ingenuity and talent which at its brightest moments fell hardly short of genius, if these could have availed, then Mr. Trosdale had long ago been

able to set his furnace before him as a finished achievement ; and to commence the other not less arduous work of convincing the world of its value. But, as he laboured to make his friend understand, there had to be set against all these things the caprice of the Goddess Fortune, who would not be bribed by labour, or conquered by talent, but needed gold, and still more gold, spent before she consented to smile her approval. Not until quite recently had he, by the aid of Selwyn, been able to find money and secure his invention, which would at once render him independent of Dandison and the world.

As he listened to the Surveyor's story Mr. Harrison felt, with a growing sadness, that it was vain to contend with him. There ran a fierceness of exultation through all his words which was not likely to submit again to discipline. It somehow happened, too, that, in spite of his enthusiasm, the Surveyor's narrative did not carry conviction to Mr. Harrison's mind. It rather induced distrust ; for the Chief-Clerk thought that, following close on every sentence, he could hear the echoing footsteps of calamity.

‘Trosdale, my dear friend,’ he said, bending forward and laying his hand on the Surveyor’s knee, ‘you are at the parting of two ways—be guided by me as to which you shall pursue. You are thinking so much of this invention that you cannot spare time to reflect as to your choice.’

‘Reflect?’ interrupted the Surveyor. ‘Time to reflect ! Why, what else have I been doing all these years ?’

Mr. Harrison shook his head.

‘You are impatient and angry with Dandison,’ he said. ‘And in your vexation you are going to take a step which you will regret. Don’t force him to extremities, Martin. You know you were not right to go away without leave ; but never mind that. Let me put the matter straight for you. I will find a way of quieting Dandison. Only stick to your office for a little while ; at any rate, until you have made your fortune out of the furnace.’

‘I will not, by God !’ cried the Surveyor, starting up, ‘I won’t truckle to Dandison in that way. Whatever I may be, no man ever called me a sycophant, Harrison ; and there isn’t a meaner sight on earth, or one more

hateful, than an old man cringing before a younger one. I never cared for my official prospects to that extent, even when I hoped to end my life in a far higher position than Dandison has toadied himself into ; and it is not likely that I can begin to eat dirt now. We have lost touch strangely, when you can make such a suggestion to me.'

'I always knew,' Mr. Harrison replied good-humouredly, 'that you were a hot-headed jackass, who would rather walk over a precipice than look if you could not climb down it. But I do not want you to eat dirt. I do not ask you to say a word to Dandison. As likely as not you will not see him for months. I hear he's going to reorganize the districts in the South of England, and that will be a tough job. Only go back to your office, Martin, and stay there. I have the Secretary's ear, and will see that this affair is forgotten.'

'And about my furnace?' asked the Surveyor grimly.

Mr. Harrison choked down an oath.

'Let it wait,' he answered ; 'make your official position secure first, and then you can

push the furnace without having poverty always by your side to spoil your bargains.'

At this the Surveyor thrust both his hands deep down into his trousers' pockets, drew up his tall figure to its full height, and stood looking down upon his friend for a few seconds before he burst out :

'Why have you come to talk to me in this way, Harrison? Do you take me for some child or idiot incapable of managing its own affairs? In God's name, how have I got on these many years past? Am I over head and ears in debt? Am I destitute? Have I starved my daughter or neglected her? or defrauded anyone of his due? If I have done none of these things, but lived an honest and decent life, no one has a right to interfere or dictate to me.'

'I have no right,' said Mr. Harrison deprecatingly, 'unless old friendship gives me one.'

'What can you know of me?' the Surveyor went on, unheeding the interruption; 'how can you, a prosperous, contented man, lay down rules for the guidance of one whose whole existence has been blighted by poverty

and disappointment? What do you know of struggles, and the scars that they leave? If you choose to prescribe at all, let it be for men who have had a surfeit of prosperity, not for those who come out of the struggle for bread maimed, and shrinking from the lightest touch. By toils and labours such as you never conceived of, I have touched success at last. I have earned the right to decide my own actions, and as I live I will exercise it.'

Mr. Harrison looked at the speaker mournfully.

'Forgive me, Trosdale,' he said; 'you will believe that I meant well?'

'It is just that which makes the trouble,' the Surveyor answered, but in a softer tone. 'Can't you understand how useless it is? You keep on talking to me about Somerset House, and Dandison, and the Secretary! Don't you see that not one of them is of more consequence to me now than the people passing in the street, whom I rub elbows with and probably shall never meet again? I am like a wheel that has changed its centre, and touches other points now as it goes round. Let me tell you once for all that I will not bow down

to Dandison. I will neither go back to my office before my suspension is removed, nor will I give any undertaking for the future. Let Dandison do his worst ; it will be a fitting incident in his career to have hounded out of the service the son of the man who was the first to befriend him when he came into it.'

'Well, well !' said Mr. Harrison, 'well, well, Martin, we won't quarrel over it, at any rate. Shake hands, and do not let us argue this evening, the first for so long that we have been together.'

The Surveyor took the outstretched hand, and laid both his own upon it.

'You are a good fellow,' he said, 'a kind, true-hearted friend, as you always were. Yes, let these matters lie at rest between us now and for the future. You can't understand my feelings about the whole accursed buisness. See,' he added, going over to the window, and throwing it wide, 'you used to be fond of music, Harrison. Listen, it is my daughter who is playing.'

He held up his hand, and there issued from the church, of which the door stood

open, a grand and solemn music. The square was at its quietest, the traffic from Old Hall Street made only a faint, humming noise, which went on as a continual undercurrent of monotonous sound, while the old chorale which was pealing from the church stood out boldly against it in its great simplicity. The music became louder and more involved, yet the chorale continued to ring forth steadily ; and Mr. Harrison, who had been listening intently, said :

‘ I know that. It is Mendelssohn’s Sixth Sonata. Let us go over, Trosdale ; the slow movement will be hardly audible here.’

They went out, and stood just within the church, while Miss Trosdale played the beautiful slow movement. When she had finished it Mr. Harrison was about to speak, but the Surveyor forestalled him.

‘ Play something else, Madge,’ he called. ‘ Play “ St. Anne,” ’ entreated Mr. Harrison.

It was growing dim in the church as the first notes of Bach’s great fugue stole forth from the organ loft. When the last notes died away the shadows had fallen thickly from the roof into the corners of the church. There

was a sound of shutting-up from the organ loft, and a moment afterwards Madge appeared, followed closely by Selwyn.

‘How well you play, Miss Trosdale,’ said Mr. Harrison; ‘thank you very much.’

‘I am glad you were pleased,’ the girl replied; ‘but I don’t play those things well. They are too great for me. It is a good organ, isn’t it?’

She looked at him in speaking with an expression which seemed to say that she desired something more than an answer to her remark—as if she had another question on her lips which she dared not put. It struck the visitor that there was in her eyes the same look he had once seen in those of a hare, when at a coursing match it had doubled, and escaped the beaters, and crouched at the feet of one of the bystanders, beseeching him, mutely, for help. All Mr. Harrison’s instincts responded to the appeal; but the language which the Surveyor had used in the last hour was still in his ears, and he knew not what to say.

‘Never mind the organ now,’ interposed Mr. Trosdale; ‘I want my tea; it is much

past our usual time. Come along, Harrison ; you have seen Mr. Serle, haven't you ?

‘ Yes ; at the office this afternoon,’ answered Mr. Harrison ; and, slipping his arm through the Surveyor’s, he returned to the house, followed by Selwyn, who had drawn Madge a little back in order to say to her :

‘ Have you any idea what he came here for ?’

‘ Not the least.’

‘ I don’t trust him,’ Selwyn said vehemently. ‘ I never trust a man with those oily manners. Do be careful what you say to him.’

‘ I will ; but I think you are wrong. He seems to me kind and good.’

There was no time for more, for the others were waiting for them. Ann had prepared the tea, and everything was ready. Over the meal Mr. Trosdale appeared exuberantly cheerful—talking almost boisterously over old days with his friend, relating stories of men, dead for years, they had both known. Madge sat very silent, looking from one to the other with grave and steady eyes. Selwyn wondered what she was thinking about.

Soon after tea was over, Mr. Harrison rose

to go. Selwyn offered to show him the way to his hotel, but it had begun to rain rather heavily, and Mr. Harrison resolutely declined all companionship.

‘No, no; I will take no one out in such weather,’ he said; ‘stay at home and smoke your pipe, Serle—if Miss Trosdale allows it, that is to say.’

As he turned towards the door, Madge, who stood a little apart from the others, laid her hand upon his arm, and looked up full in his face. He just touched her fingers, and then, with a little gesture as if he had said ‘I know, child! I understand you,’ passed out into the night.





CHAPTER XII.

AT THE COMPTON.

PERSONS who envied him his popularity, persons possessed of uncompromising manners, who stated they would rather remain unsought for ever than be False, were fond of hinting that Mr. Harrison was insincere.

There is no charge more easily brought against a man, and since the implication it contains proves so extremely complimentary to those who are not popular, there is none more eagerly accepted.

But with respect to Mr. Harrison (as well as many other charming people), it was not true. No one could have wished a stauncher friend, and he liked his acquaintances all the better, perhaps, because his circle was so

large it was impossible for him to see a great deal of any of them.

It is the daily rub of intimacy which wearies and tries the best of us. When we have exhausted a man's good points, it is natural we should begin to consider his bad, if only for the sake of variety; and the wisest advice we can offer young folks going out into the world is :

‘Never give anyone a chance of finding out how tiresome you can be.’

One of the reasons adduced by the persons referred to in proof of Mr. Harrison's insincerity, was that he did not think it necessary to be always searching after his friends. He had pretty early in life recognised the fact that an intimacy which requires constant attention in the way of correspondence, or replenishing with the fuel of incessant visiting, is more plague than profit. Further, he was wise enough to know we are always moving in a circle which is continually being crossed by other circles. Sooner or later those who have met once are sure to meet again, and no man was more glad to meet and greet an old friend when their orbits touched than Mr.

Harrison. Years might have passed, bringing riches to one, poverty to another, changes to all ; but time and circumstance made no difference to him. He was ready to condole as to congratulate ; to say, ' My poor fellow, I am so sorry,' as to exclaim ' My dear fellow, I am so glad.' His rejoicings held no dreg of envy, his mourning no secret germ of triumph. His sympathy, his influence, his purse, his time, were freely at the service of any old acquaintance who needed one or all of these forms of help, till the inexorable progress of events separated them once more.

Where other men moving in a narrower circle helped few, he helped many. Where they counted their tens, he counted thousands. He was always doing good to somebody, not because he went out of his way to seek a great mission, but because few touched him who did not benefit by the contact.

Harry who had lost caste, and with it hope and many other good things, will never forget the day when he met his old college friend, whose words and face recalled better days.

' Why, how is this ?' he asked. ' Why did you not come to me ? This will never do ;

we must have a consultation—two heads are better than one, you know ;’ while Sir Richard, who had won laurels and titles, the applause of men and the admiration of women, since that bright morning when they parted in Southampton Harbour, and who was inclined to be a trifle too much elated, and, truth to tell, somewhat bumptious, went away after an evening passed with his former friend, sobered by the sight of Harrison’s cheerful content, and amazed at his ungrudging delight in achievements the glories of which he could only share through the power of his utter unselfishness.

Mr. Harrison had not met or heard of Trosdale for years; perhaps never would have heard of him again but for Mr. Dandison. Yet as he walked back from St. Paul’s Square to the hotel where he was stopping, his heart felt sore and sad for old Jemmy Trosdale’s foolish son.

‘And Martin won’t let me help him,’ he thought; ‘poor fellow, he was always masterful. He would resent my aid; but I don’t like to see anyone rushing to ruin without making some effort to stop him. And there’s his

girl, too, and young Serle—all, all bound to sink with him. No, I must do something; the difficulty is to know what, though.'

The more he thought about the position, the more this difficulty increased, and it was not till he was sitting at breakfast the next morning that he decided he would endeavour to see Madge alone, and talk matters over with her.

Madge was giving a lesson when he called, but she left her pupil and came to him immediately.

'I am here to trouble you again,' he began, taking her hand kindly. 'If you can spare me five minutes I want to ask you what we had better do. Your father must not leave the service—he must not, really.'

'He has quite made up his mind, I am sorry to say,' she answered.

'But you will use your influence?'

'I have no influence, Mr. Harrison, nor has anyone.'

She dropped out the last words despairingly.

'Then the only thing we can do is to hope the furnace may prove a great success.'

She did not make any reply ; she stood looking at the fire with that expression which had puzzled Selwyn so much when he first knew her.

‘I wish you would tell me what you are thinking of, my child,’ said Mr. Harrison ; but Madge only shook her head. She could not talk freely about her father even to her father’s friend. Loyalty had taught her the hardest test a woman can learn—to refrain from speech. During the years they dwelt together under one roof, yet apart in mind and soul as though separated by oceans and continents, she had uttered no impatient or reproachful word concerning her father to any stranger, and she was not going to speak one now.

Mr. Harrison watched her for a moment thoughtfully. He was not a man given to wish impossibilities, but just then he did wish he could spirit her away from all the evil he felt to be in store.

‘Supposing your father’s invention should not turn out all that we hope,’ he hazarded at last, ‘what will become of you ?’

‘I do not know,’ she answered. ‘We shall

have his pension, I suppose ; and I shall not lose my pupils.'

'And what about young Serle?' said Mr. Harrison.

'He will stay at the office, of course. He will not throw up his appointment,' she answered confidently.

'I think it extremely probable that he will.'

'Oh, Mr. Harrison! what makes you think so? He would be mad to do such a thing!'

'He would ; but it is in his mind to do it, for all that.'

She clasped her hands tight, and stood with lips compressed and eyes bent on the floor, silent, while Mr. Harrison looked at her.

She was a very remarkable girl. He did not know that he had ever before seen a girl at once so handsome, so strong, and so tender.

'My dear,' he said at last, 'the young fellow must be saved.'

'At all costs,' she answered ; 'at any cost! If he came to ruin through us—and

throwing up his appointment would mean ruin, I suppose——?’

‘I should say so.’

‘It would break my heart. If I had spoken when he first came here—if I had warned him—if I had never let him identify our interests with his own—I might have saved him ; but now it is too late—too late !’

‘Not if he be a reasonable being,’ answered Mr. Harrison cheerfully. ‘I mean a being open to hear reason. Is he?’

‘I believe so ; though he has never heard it here.’

‘What is he ? who is he ? where does he come from ? Has he no relations in this part of the country ?’

‘He has no relations anywhere,’ Madge replied. ‘He came here a stranger, and my father——’

She was going to say ‘took him in,’ but she stopped, feeling the words might bear another and truer construction than she intended.

‘Ah ! your poor father,’ said Mr. Harrison, who knew what was in the girl’s mind as well as she did herself ; ‘he did not see how

it would end—he does not see it now ; but tell me more about Serle. I want to help him if I can. Now, who were his relations ? I suppose he had some once upon a time.’

Madge told him. She began with the curate, and ended with that curate’s uncle. A simple annal ; but one which touched Mr. Harrison’s fancy.

‘ Comes of a good stock,’ he said. ‘ Serle ought to be a man happy and content to do his duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call him,’ he said in the kindly mellow voice which had so often won confidence and inspired love. ‘ I do not believe the boy is unsettled. I think he only seems to be so because he is torn and distracted by the sight of your father’s troubles. Bless you ! all he wants is to be left to do his duty ; and we must make him see what that duty really is. Now you have influence there, have you not ?’

‘ Very little, I am afraid,’ returned the girl, who knew Selwyn’s influence over her was far greater than hers over him.

‘ Why, how is that ? He is in love with you, is he not ?’

The question was so totally unexpected, for a second Madge's self-possession was quite upset. The blood rushed in such a torrent to her head that she felt as if choking—cheeks and brow and throat were dyed with the crimson tide, and though she managed to say, with an effort at bright repartee which her trembling lips and blushing face belied, 'If so, he has never told me,' Mr. Harrison understood perfectly young Serle cared for Madge, and that Madge knew the fact.

'I am very glad to hear it,' answered the Chief-Clerk. 'Many a man would not have exercised such self-restraint and shown such delicacy of feeling. I think better of him for what you tell me. I think very well of him indeed. Now I see my way a little clearer, and I will try to put matters right as far as Serle is concerned; but you must help me.'

'Only tell me how, and I will do my best.'

'I am sure you will. Now listen, like a good girl. I shall not return to Shrewsbury till to-morrow. Do you think you can man-

age for me to see Serle this evening at my hotel without your father's knowledge ?'

'My father will not be at home to-night.'

'Why—where is he going ?'

'He left for Sheffield by an early train this morning.'

'Good heaven ! has he taken leave of his senses ?' exclaimed Mr. Harrison, for once surprised out of the urbanity which was his distinguishing characteristic.

'Will his going injure him more at Somerset House ?' asked Madge.

Mr. Harrison did not answer ; he was not thinking of Mr. Trosdale's ruined fortunes in the Civil Service, or of Somerset House, or anything except of Madge herself.

'Will it really injure him ?' repeated the girl anxiously.

'I do not know. I cannot tell. I hope not,' said Mr. Harrison hastily. 'It is rather imprudent, I think, for him to go away again just now ; but I dare say no great harm will come of it. To return, however, to young Serle. Can you arrange that he shall call on me this evening ? I find that a dear old friend of mine resides near Bolton, and I

intend to look him up ; but Serle will find me at the Compton any time after seven o'clock. Good-bye ! do not make yourself miserable : all will come right after a while. Good-bye—good-bye ! God bless you !

‘Good-bye, Mr. Harrison, and thank you so much ; but you won’t—you won’t——’

‘Won’t what, you silly puss ?’ asked Mr. Harrison, who had his hand on the latch. ‘What is it, Madge ?’ he added more seriously, the while he paused, wondering at her evident confusion. ‘Surely you need not be afraid of saying anything to me.’

‘No—I am not afraid, only—you won’t speak to Mr. Serle—about——’

‘I won’t speak to Mr. Serle about—? oh ! I understand you now, my dear child. I really have a little discretion, and I think I know what is due to your sex. Besides, if I were to say a word that would place you in a false position, my wife would give me such a scolding—she would, indeed ; and I do not like being scolded. To speak in very sober earnest, I have daughters of my own, and I should no more dream of wounding the pride of another man’s daughter than I

should of blowing up Somerset House. I am going to talk to Serle very seriously, but not about you. I want to save him from making a mess of his life—that is all.’

‘You are so good,’ murmured Madge.

‘I mean to tell him I consider him a very absurd young man to quarrel with his bread-and-butter for a mere crotchet. He won’t get such bread-and-butter again in a hurry, I can assure him. Now you must not try to beg him off, for I intend to give him a good talking to, and I am known to be a most dreadful person when I give my mind to talking.’

‘You could never be dreadful,’ said Madge.

‘Couldn’t I?—ah! that’s all you know. It is well I am leaving Liverpool before you find me out, and while you still can think nicely of me and trust me. You will trust me, won’t you?’

For answer she gave him her hand, and raised her soft hazel eyes to his with a look which haunted him.

‘Indeed you may trust me, dear brave child,’ he said, and so went, with kindly haste, not wishing to prolong their conference.

All the way to Bolton he debated whether or not he should drop any hint to young Serle regarding the difficulty which was in his mind.

Few men knew the world better than Mr. Harrison ; no man could have felt more indignant with another than he did with Mr. Trosdale for neglecting his duty towards that sweet creature Madge. Yet the result of his mental discussion was that he would refrain from comment or interference.

‘ If the land they live in cannot exactly be described as Arcadia, it is Bohemia, which comes to pretty nearly the same thing—an innocent Bohemia where Society’s writ does not run ; which is not governed by Mrs. Grundy ; where what “people may say” is not thought of, because there are no people to say anything. Why should I intrude the laws and notions of my wicked old world into such an Eden ? Why should I play the serpent’s part, and talk to these young innocents about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ? I won’t. Besides, I might as well preach propriety to a pair shipwrecked on some desert island. It would seem no doubt a

very shocking position to our dear old friend Mrs. Grundy, who is not shipwrecked, but visiting and receiving in Belgravia. Still, there is no use in lamenting over the matter. Lamentations will not get them back to the mainland. When they are, which won't be till the devil of invention is cast out of Trosdale, nature, or chance, or some good-natured friend, will no doubt open their eyes. Meanwhile, it is just as well they should remain shut, and I certainly shall not try to open them.'

Which was as kind and wise a conclusion as he could have come to. The path Selwyn and Madge were pursuing could not be considered easy. To them it seemed bristling with dangers and anxieties. But, as yet, no scorpion had stung them. Not one of the many venomous serpents, that breed and multiply in the dusty highway most men traverse perforce, had reared its head to bite. They were pursuing a road of their own, which was safe enough. The babes in the wood were not more innocent of wrong; and he who walks ignorantly without fear in the darkness of night by the edge of some

precipice he would shudder to tread by day, was never led through danger more safely.

‘I don’t want to go and see him,’ said Selwyn when Madge gave him Mr. Harrison’s message. ‘I don’t know him, and I have had almost as much of Somerset House in the last few days as I can stand. I feel very much inclined to have nothing more to do with anyone connected with the place.’

‘Ah, don’t talk like that!’ implored Madge, in her most persuasive tones; ‘if you knew how anxious I am already, you would not add to my troubles.’

‘I add to them! Not for the whole world. But I can’t see how I shall lessen them by going to the Compton Hotel to-night.’

‘Nor can I tell you; but go, nevertheless. Go to please me; go because I promised that you would; go for any reason you like; only go.’

And Selwyn yielded and went.

On hearing Selwyn announced, Mr. Harrison rose at once, and greeted him cordially.

‘I am delighted to see you, Serle,’ he said in the tone of a man welcoming an old

friend ; 'this is very good of you. I was beginning to feel a trifle dull, tired of my own company, and I feared you would not come.'

So saying, Mr. Harrison conducted his guest to the window in which he had been sitting, and wheeled a second easy-chair towards a table on which two glasses stood beside a bottle of Burgundy.

'Sit down there,' he continued. 'You will not be cold at that distance from the fire. I find this window a very pleasant seat. It is so delightfully idle to look down on the people passing, though the streets are emptying fast at this hour. There is not the same excitement as in watching the throng that rushes down Church Street in the day-time ; but yet the constant dropping past the window, now of single persons, now of twos and threes together, has a soothing effect on the brain—generates a sort of pensiveness. You have not that pleasure in St. Paul's Square.'

'I don't think it a pleasure which would appeal strongly to me in any place,' answered Selwyn ; 'and after all, I do not like town life.'

‘ Ah ! you are from the country, I hear—from Somersetshire. I used to know that county well, especially round Milverton.’

Selwyn was interested at once.

‘ It must have been the fishing which took you there,’ he observed.

‘ Right, it was the fishing. Don’t you smoke ? Try these cigarettes.’

And with that Mr. Harrison plunged into a conversation about Selwyn’s native county. He had not exaggerated when he said he knew it well. Rod in hand, he had traversed the banks of every stream and river in it, as well as in the adjoining county of Devon ; and he had numberless incidents to relate about places with which Selwyn was familiar, involving sometimes persons with whom he was acquainted.

He knew Sea Court by name and sight, and had once even met its owner, Selwyn’s kind friend, Mr. Adams, in a neighbouring country house. The conversation was delightful to Selwyn. It was the first time since he obtained his appointment that he had met a man who was acquainted with his own county ; who listened to what he

had to say not only from courtesy, or from interest in him, but out of apparent delight in the subject itself. As he spoke of those familiar scenes, a thousand recollections were thronging through his memory; faces which were half forgotten, tones of voice he had thought never to hear again, returned to him as vividly as ever. He fancied even that the broad Somersetshire accent was sounding in his ears, and his eyes more than once grew dim at some recollection which would not be suppressed.

Mr. Harrison saw that the lad was pleased and softened, and gradually led him to talk of his own people; and so of his life up to the time at which he competed in the Grade I. examination for the Civil Service.

‘And how are you pleased now you have obtained the appointment?’ he asked.

‘I am not pleased at all,’ replied Selwyn bluntly. ‘I am dissatisfied.’

‘Indeed! will you tell me on what ground? You may do so quite frankly. Remember, I am not the Chief-Inspector, but only a private friend, and this is quite a private conversation.’

‘I am sure you will regard it as such. I am disappointed first because the appointment does not rank so well as I imagined. My colleagues are not gentlemen for the most part. I expected they would be.’

‘I cannot say you are altogether wrong. It would have been better if those appointments had never been filled by means of the Grade I. competition. That is for gentlemen, this is not. I urged this point very strongly when the change was made ; but after all it will matter less to you when you are yourself a Surveyor in a country district.’

‘It will always matter greatly,’ said Selwyn decisively.

‘Even if you should be appointed to a Somersetshire district, so that you might live within reach of your old friends ?’

‘Ah, then ! but that would not last long.’

‘It would not ; nor would it be for your interest that it should. Feeling the want of associates of your own class so strongly as you do, your most earnest endeavour should be to make your way as quickly as possible to the head of your branch of the Service, so as to be promoted to some permanent em-

ployment in Somerset House. Believe me, your position would there be precisely what you chose to make it. Living on a sufficient income, though not a large one, in London you would have a defined position; and it would lie with you to enjoy practically what society you might please. Meantime, do your best to rise in your present service. I am sure you can; and I need not tell you how it is to be done.'

'You speak very encouragingly,' answered Selwyn, 'but you do not know how long I should have to wait before having any chance of the promotion you speak of. It would be as long again probably as Jacob served for Rachel.'

'I do not think so. There is a great dearth of capable young men on the Surveyors' list. Only master your work, and be careful to keep on good terms as far as possible with your chiefs, and you are certain to rise rapidly.'

'You have hit the sore now,' said Selwyn, with a bitter laugh; 'I am already on the worst terms with Mr. Dandison.'

'I know all about that,' replied Mr.

Harrison. 'Strictly speaking, of course, you were somewhat in fault ; but I do not think your chances have suffered much as yet. Stick to your work, keep out of any further quarrels with your chiefs, and you will do excellently well. I can judge your prospects better than you ; and I tell you, from my knowledge, that they are by no means to be despised.'

Selwyn sat for some minutes without speaking. It had grown quite dark while the two men were talking, and Mr. Harrison now rose and rang for lights. When they were brought, and the fire had been revived into a cheerful blaze, Selwyn said, standing on the hearthrug :

'Pray tell me, Mr. Harrison, whether you think I have still any prospects in the service?'

'What an extraordinary question!' answered his host, setting down the bottle from which he was filling Selwyn's glass rather sharply ; 'I am not sure that I rightly understand you.'

'I look at myself as under a cloud. I gathered from what Mr. Dandison said,

and what I have heard since, that my character was almost hopelessly damaged.'

Mr. Harrison muttered something in his breath which Selwyn did not catch ; but which seemed to bear uncomplimentary reference to the Chief-Inspector, before he answered :

'My dear fellow, you are harassed and annoyed just now, and you take these things too seriously. In a little while you will see matters in their true proportions. Meanwhile, take my word that you have suffered hardly any permanent damage ; and that you have your future still entirely in your own hands.'

He paused for a minute, and then, in the winning manner which made every man his friend, he said :

'I want to see you succeed in life, Serle ; I want to see you clear of all that is annoying you now. Promise me you will do nothing rash or foolish. Promise me that you will work hard, and master your profession ; that you will determine to rise ; that you will never despond ; that you will try not to chafe at the snubs you may have to endure ; and above all, that you will keep your temper, and re-

member your chiefs, as well as you, have to endure what tries their tempers sorely. Promise me all this, my dear fellow ; your father, if he were alive and here, could not help you more than by making you give your word to be a good, brave man.'

'I do promise,' said Selwyn, quite conquered, 'and I thank you heartily for your goodness to me.'

'That's well, that's all right. And remember, my lad, if you have to wait as long for your promotion as you think, you may have many consolations in that time. One's wife, Serle, and one's own home, make a man very happy.'

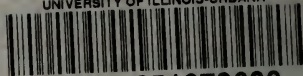
Not long afterwards Selwyn left the hotel, in a very different frame of mind from that in which he had entered it.

END OF VOL. II.





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